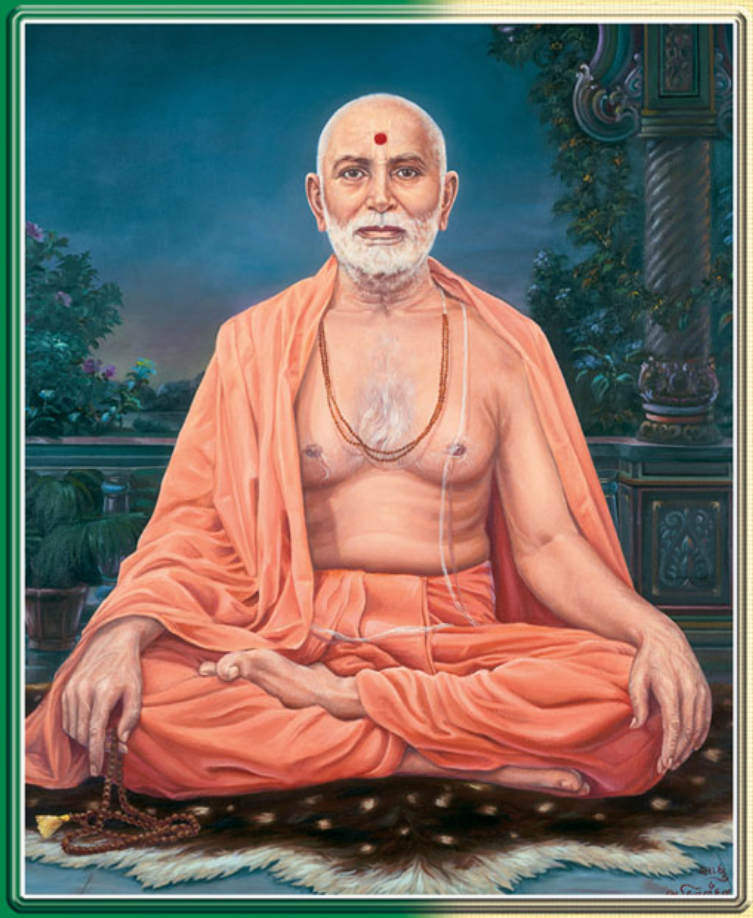
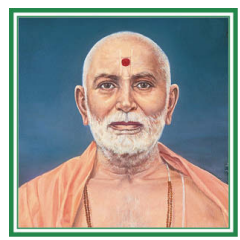
SATSANG PRAVESH



Shastriji Maharaj

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 6



Shastriji Maharaj

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Glossary

Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organization, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, presents a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and extend their fullest co-operation.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum as worked out in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in the preparation of these books.

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

Vasant Panchmi
V.S. 2028 (1972 ce)
Atladra

Publisher's Note

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the supreme God-Purushottam manifested on this earth, together with his divine abode, Akshardham, in the form of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. Bhagwan Swaminarayan taught the Vedic tradition of dual worship in the form of Akshar and Purushottam. He taught that the goal of life is to attain the virtues of Akshar and offer devotion to Purushottam.

Many witnessed their divine deeds but failed to realize their true glory. Despite the efforts of Gunatitanand Swami and Bhagatji Maharaj, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan was truly understood by only a few.

However, through the efforts of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy became widely accepted. He suffered many hardships and overcame much opposition to build five magnificent mandirs and enshrine the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam, as per the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He built the first mandir in Bochasan in 1907, thus establishing the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).

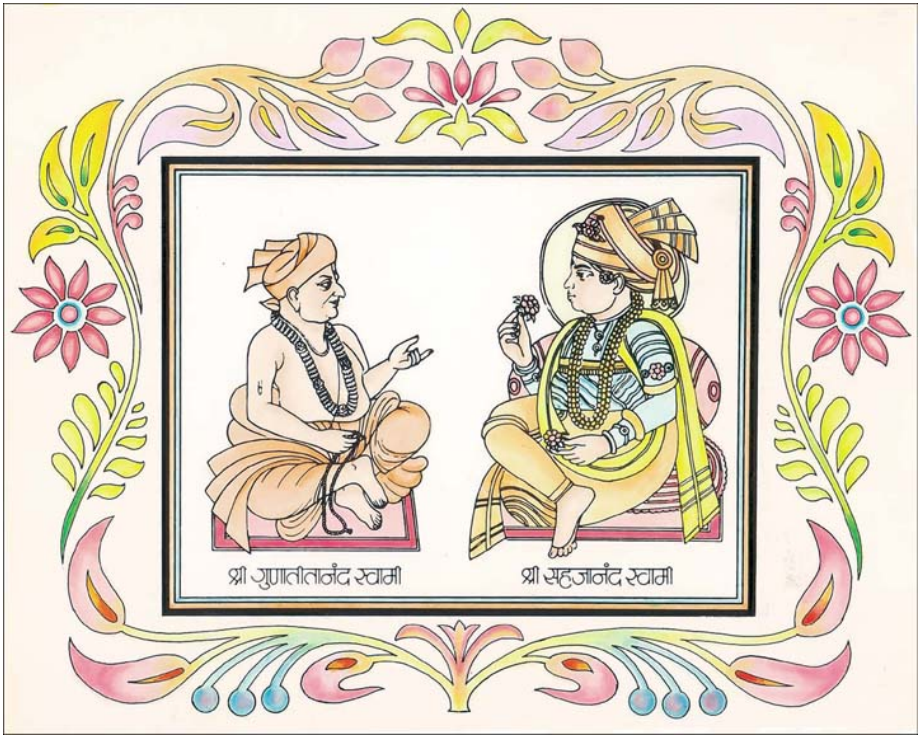
Shastriji Maharaj's saintly life of dedication, service, faith and devotion inspired many to join the BAPS and progress on the spiritual path.

This publication, Shastriji Maharaj, provides a brief insight into his life and work. It is a truly inspiring example of what one man's determination to reveal the truth can achieve.

This book serves as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Pravesh Examinations.

It is our earnest prayer that all satsangis study this book carefully, pass the examinations with flying colours, and above all, derive immense spiritual benefits and please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānni parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar Purushottam, Gunātit jnānne gāishu...ame 2
Ame sau Shriji tanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...ame 3
Juo sau motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kai te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātit Swāmi...ame 4

Translation

Pledge: Ame Sau Swamina Balak...

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this movement and will undergo any suffering. We will sing the praises of Akshar-Purushottam.

We are the sons of Shriji Maharaj; we have our abode in Akshar. Consecrated as we are to *swadharma* (religious faith), we have no apprehension whatsoever. Lord Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our

goal.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

1. Preamble

Shriji Maharaj came into this world with many objectives, one of which was to spread true *upasana* and thus establish Ekantik Dharma. True *upasana* is to understand that Akshar and Purushottam descended in to this world as Gunatitanand Swami and Shriji Maharaj, respectively. True *upasana* is to become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam. To become *aksharrup*, one must first associate with one who is himself Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami. Thereafter, one can worship Purushottam, Shriji Maharaj.

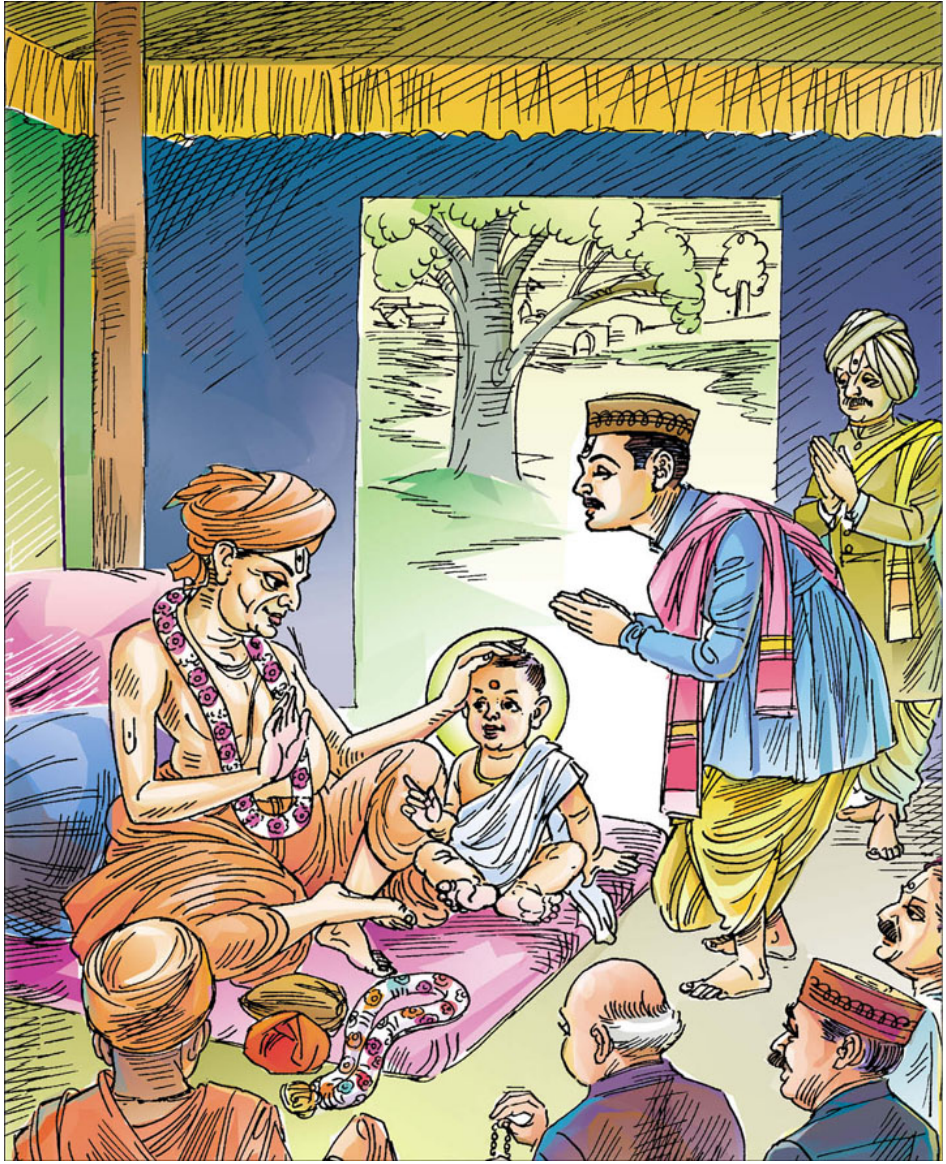
When God descends into this world in human form, people find it difficult to recognize him. Perceiving God as merely human, they fail to understand his divinity. Thus, Shriji Maharaj's *paramhansas* explained his greatness to the comman man. Among them, Gunatitanand Swami continuously explained that Shriji Maharaj was the Supreme God. Swami's words were filled with saintliness and the power of conviction. They reflected his state of enlightenment. As a result, the belief that Shriji Maharaj is the Supreme God began to spread throughout the Sampraday.

Similarly, few were able to recognize Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar until his disciples, Bhagatji Maharaj and Jaga Bhakta, openly revealed his true form. The knowledge of Akshar and Purushottam began to spread. However, some of the followers of the Sampraday obstinately held to their tradition-bound beliefs. They vehemently opposed the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and its followers. As a result, no one dared to provoke even more opposition by consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the sanctum of a mandir.

Many senior sadhus firmly adhered to the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. However, deep in their minds, a doubt lingered: Would this *upasana* ever be enshrined in the sanctum of a mandir? Would the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami ever be consecrated? Many influential sadhus had tried in the past to do so. However, they had failed in the face of fierce opposition.

Thus, these sadhus continued to pray to Shriji Maharaj. They anxiously waited for someone who could accomplish such a feat; someone who would be a vessel for Shriji Maharaj's divinity and powers; someone who would carry forward his noble mission.

2. Birth and Blessings



"This brother of yours will one day become a sadhu..."

The day for which so many had been praying finally arrived. It was almost noon on Monday, 31 January 1865 (Maha *sud* 5, Samvat 1921). On this auspicious day of Vasant Panchmi, in the village of Mahelav, in the Charotar region of Gujarat, Shastriji Maharaj was born. His father, Dhoribhai, and his mother, Hetba, had two daughters and three sons. Their daughters were Sonaba and Raliyatba, and their sons were Mathurbhai, Laldas, and finally little Dungar, who would later be known as Shastriji Maharaj. Years ago, their family had been fortunate enough to come in touch with Shriji Maharaj. Dungar's grandfather, Ajubhai Zaveridas Patel, had met Maharaj.

From a young age, Dungar was very gentle and charming. Everyone was drawn to

him. Everyone adored him. When Dungar was six months old, Shukanand Swami and Vaikuntanand Brahmachari came to Mahelav. Mathurbhai took Dungar to Shukanand Swami. He asked Swami to give *vartman,* initiation, to little Dungar. Dungar gazed up at Swami constantly.

Shukanand Swami initiated Dungar into the Swaminarayan Sampraday. Then, placing his hand on Dungar's head, Swami blessed him and said, "He is a very great devotee from his past birth. In the future, he will renounce the world, become a sadhu, and liberate your entire family."

Mathurbhai returned home with Dungar and related Swami's words to the entire family. Swami's prediction delighted everyone.

The following year, Gunatitanand Swami came to Vartal for the Chaitra Punam festival on 31 March 1866 (Chaitra *sud* 15, Samvat 1922). On his way back to Junagadh, Swami passed through Mahelav. Mathurbhai brought little Dungar to Swami and asked him to initiate Dungar. Surprised, Swami asked, "Has he still not been initiated?"

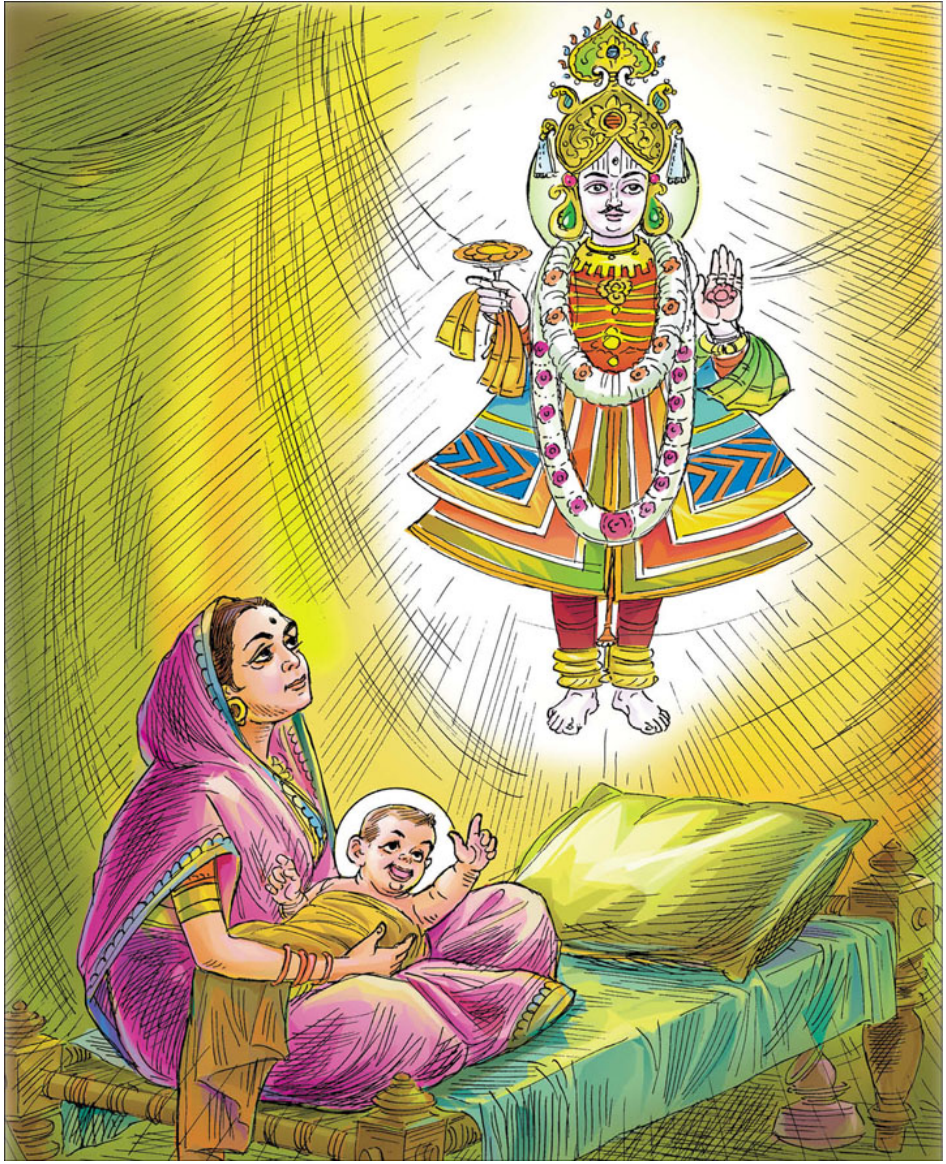
"Actually, he was initiated last year by Shukanand Swami," Mathurbhai clarified.

Hearing this, Swami replied, "Shuk Swami is considered the right hand of Shriji Maharaj. So, if Shuk Swami has initiated him, consider him to have been initiated by Shriji Maharaj himself." With these words, Gunatitanand Swami placed his hand on Dungar's head and blessed him.

He said to Mathurbhai, "Your brother will one day become a sadhu and spread the true glory of Shriji Maharaj as the Supreme God. By delivering spiritual discourses he will invigorate and enhance the Swaminarayan Sampraday."

Swami looked affectionately at Dungar and gave him a sweet snack as *prasad*.

3. Divinity, Devotion and Austerity



Dungar Bhakata enjoying the darshan of Shriji Maharaj

The words of Gunatitanand Swami seemed to be coming true. Dungar's childhood was filled with devotion and divinity. He often showed great miracles. Once, during a wedding in the family, Dungar fell ill. Soon his illness increased and he became serious. Using his divine powers, Dungar suppressed his heart beat. He entered into a state of samadhi, a divine trance in which he remained blissfully engrossed in the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj.

To his parents, Dungar appeared dead. They were devastated. By immediately performing the final rites of their young son it would disturb the wedding ceremony which was already in progress. Mourning the death of their son, they

covered Dungar and quietly laid him in Dhulabhai's house next door. After the wedding was over, they returned heavy-hearted to Dhulabhai's house. But to their surprise they saw little Dungar laughing and playing. They saw a radiant aura of light encircling his body. All of his relatives were overjoyed by this miracle.

A few years later, Dungar's mother passed away. Now, Dungar had only his father. His father grew even more fond of Dungar, taking more and more care of him.

Dungar was quite different from other children. While other children played all sorts of games, Dungar would build little mandirs from sand. Dungar would install a tiny *murti* of God in his small earthen mandir. He would offer snacks to the *murti*, imagining that he had prepared a great *annakut* for God. Then, he would perform *arti* of the small *murti*. Seeing little Dungar engaged in such devotion, people believed that one day Dungar would become a great sadhu.

At the age of six, Dungar went to a family wedding in the village of Karamsad. While everyone else was enjoying the occasion, Dungar slipped out into the village and went to the local mandir. There, he began to offer devotional service and give spiritual discourses. Soon it was time for lunch. Everyone wondered where Dungar could be. They searched everywhere for him. Finally, they found him at the mandir. However, Dungar refused to have lunch, explaining that since it was Ekadashi he was observing a fast. Everyone was astonished. How could a six-year-old boy choose to fast when such a sumptuous meal was being served?

There were four hundred people at the wedding. Everyone pressured Dungar to eat. Undaunted, Dungar declared, "I have heard from the shastras that to eat food made from grains on Ekadashi is as sinful as eating meat. So, I will not eat."

Everyone was touched by Dungar's firm vow to obey the shastras. They stopped pressuring him and ordered sweets, prepared without grains, from the nearby town of Anand. As the story of Dungar's firm vow spread throughout the village, everyone came to have darshan of this pious child.

Not only did Dungar perform austerities like fasting, he also harboured a great love for spiritual discourses. Daily he would listen to incidents from the Ramayan, Mahabharat, and Shrimad Bhagvat from his father. He would also listen to various shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampraday – the Vachanamrut, Bhaktachintamani, Nishkulanand Kavya. At night he would go to sleep only after reciting the verses of the *chesta*.

4. Fearlessness

The fearless Dungar Bhakta

Right from childhood Dungar was brave. Once, his father left him asleep at home and went to the farm. Soon, Dungar awoke. He looked around. It was midnight. He did not see his father. He assumed that his father would be at the farm. Deciding to go there, Dungar grabbed a stick and set off alone in the darkness, chanting the Swaminarayan mantra as he walked.

It was said that a ghost haunted the road to the farm at night. That was why Dhoribhai was so surprised when he saw little Dungar come to the farm alone on such a dark night. Dhoribhai asked, “Didn’t you feel scared coming here all by yourself?”

Dungar innocently replied, “Haven’t you told me that Shriji Maharaj accompanies and protects he who chants the Swaminarayan mantra. Well, that is exactly what I did. I have brought Maharaj with me. If a ghost had come along the way, I would have hit

it with this stick and driven it off."

Dhoribhai's heart swelled with pride when he heard his young son's brave words.

Reading the discarded manuscripts of shastras in Vartal

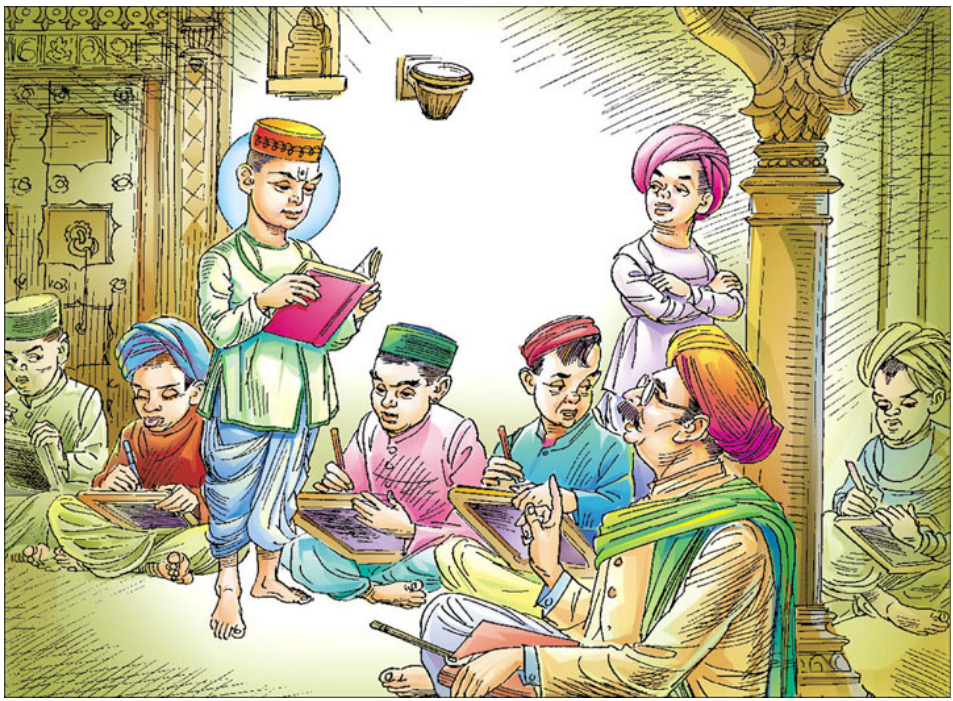
Dungar had now cultivated a habit of listening to scriptural stories. Without listening to them, he just would not feel at ease. When his father gave him work to do on the farm, Dungar would set his terms, "You must promise to tell me stories about God." Dungar found pleasure only in God.

By the age of seven, Dungar regularly attended every Punam festival in Vartal. There, he would sit with each of the sadhus, listen to their discourses and strengthen his spiritual knowledge and detachment from the world. He would never feel inclined to go home. When it was time to leave, someone would have to come and look for him.

The scribes in Vartal often threw away old and unwanted pages from their

handwritten manuscripts of the shastras. When he came to Vartal, Dungar would often gather these pages, and in the posture of a great scholar, read them on the platform beside the mandir. He had not even started his studies, yet his behaviour indicated that he would one day become an unrivaled scholar.

5. Schooling



His memory was sharp and his intelligence was high

In 1874 (Samvat 1930), he began studying in the village school under Gangaram Mehta. His sharp memory and powerful intellect helped him learn all his lessons immediately and excel in schoolwork. As a result, Gangaram became extremely fond of Dungar and began to pay more and more attention to him.

Even from that age, Dungar had resolved that, "If I
am to study, I will be a student of the first rank,
and if I am to become a sadhu, I will be a sadhu of the first rank." With such a high aim, Dungar was able to learn a lot in a short time.

In addition to his studies at school, Dungar began to study the Bhagvat and the shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampraday from the sadhus who would come to Mahelav's Swaminarayan mandir. When there were no sadhus in the mandir, Dungar, at the age of nine, would give spiritual discourses. His discourses left listeners spellbound. Because of his many virtues, the people of Mahelav adored Dungar.

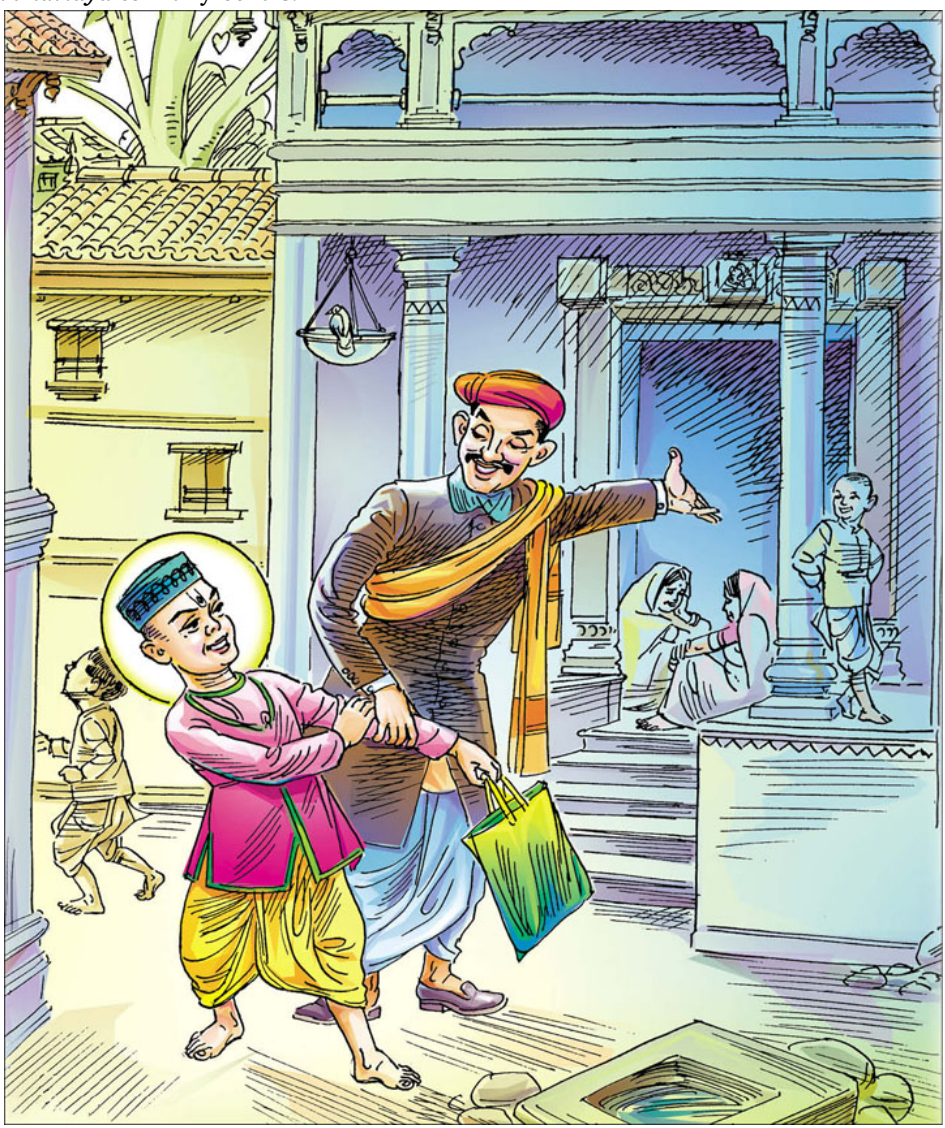
Ravjibhai, a wealthy businessman of Mahelav, did not have any children. Every

morning he would wistfully watch Dungar walk by on his way to school. He couldn't help but wish, "If only I had a son like Dungar. A boy like him would make suitable use of my wealth and further my prestige."

Once he asked, "Dungar! Will you stay with me? I will enroll you in a prestigious school in Petlad where they will teach you English. Then, when you grow up, you can become a big officer in the British Empire!"

Dungar responded to Ravjibhai with a kind-hearted laugh and a penetrating insight.

"If, even after so much studying, I have to remain subservient to others, then I do not want such an education. I will become a sadhu and a scholar, and I will teach *brahmavidya* to many others."

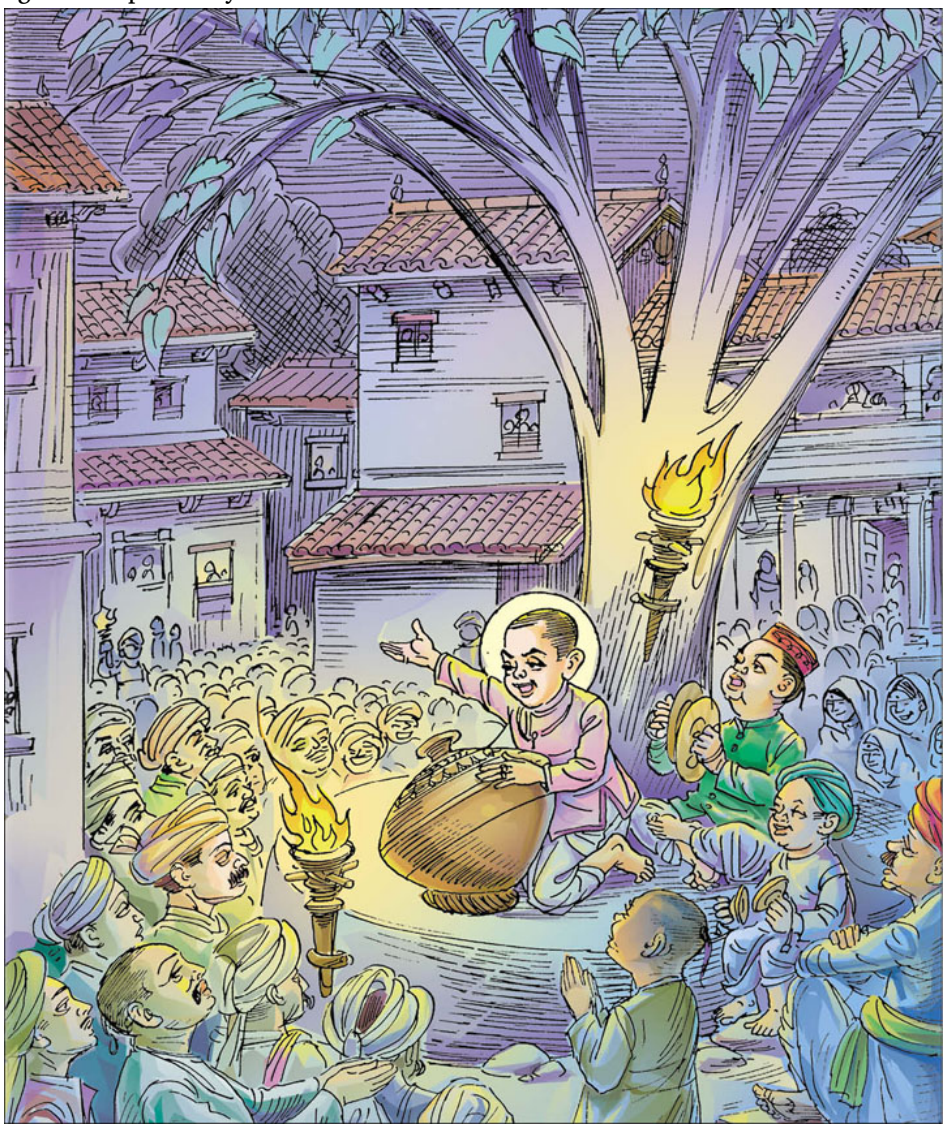


"Dungar! Will you stay with me?"

Dungar also possessed an extraordinary aesthetic sense.

Once, a crowd had assembled at Ravjibhai's front door. Ravjibhai was refurnishing the front of his mansion. Everyone was debating about where Ravjibhai's new chandelier should be hung.

"If you hang the chandelier on the first floor, it will look very nice," observed Dungar as he passed by.



Reciting the Mahabharat

Sure enough, hanging the chandelier as Dungar suggested solved the dilemma. Everyone agreed that the chandelier now truly enhanced the splendour of the mansion.

Similarly, Dungar once observed that the porch of the Vaishnav haveli would have looked better with round pillars. Again, everyone liked Dungar's suggestion.

Once, a new *sinhasan* was being made for the village mandir. Dungar advised the carpenter to make the *sinhasan* identical to the one in the Vartal mandir assembly hall.

Everyone respected his keen powers of observation and his natural sense of architectural design.

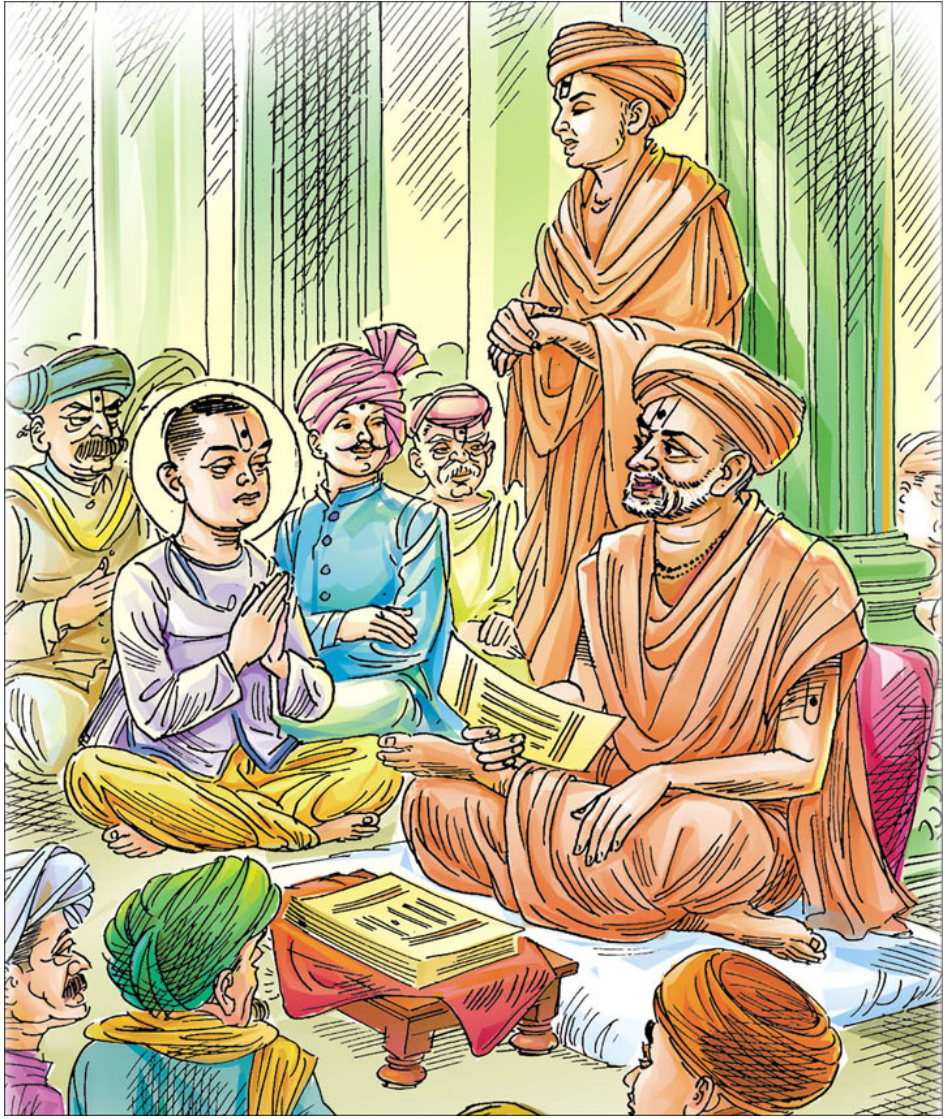
Speakers delivering spiritual discourses would often visit the village. They would hold general assemblies and recite passages from the scriptures. Even at such a young age, Dungar was able to memorize each verse after listening to the recital just once.

Once, a Maanbhatt from the village of Vaso came to Mahelav. Like travelling minstrels, Maanbhatts would travel around the villages singing stories from the shastras while playing the *maan*, a traditional metal pot used as a percussion instrument. Just by listening to a few days of this Maanbhatt's recital of the Mahabharat, Dungar picked up the style in which the verses were sung. The entire recital of the Mahabharat would take several weeks. Suddenly, half-way through the recital, the Maanbhatt fell ill and died. The people of the village mourned his sudden death. However, out of respect for the Mahabharat scripture, everyone desired that the recital be completed. Many of the villagers were well aware of Dungar's devotion and powerful memory. Surely, Dungar would recall the remaining verses, since he had heard recitals of the Mahabharat several times before. Together, they urged him to finish reciting the remaining verses.

Dungar sat on the platform of the village square. Everyone gathered to listen. He began to sing the remaining verses exactly as the Maanbhatt had done. He delighted the residents of Mahelav by finishing the remainder of the recital.

Everyone now referred to Dungar as 'Bhagat', a sincere devotee of God. Their affection for him grew. Whenever sadhus came to the village, they would seat Dungar at the front of the assembly and then speak. When there were no sadhus in the mandir, Dungar would retell their teachings from memory.

6. In Search of a Guru



"Do you wish to become a sadhu my dear boy?"

Dungar no longer preferred to stay at home. Now, he wished to renounce it and become a sadhu. While he did not feel any affinity for his relatives, he found it difficult to be away from sadhus. Whenever he went to Vartal for the full-moon day festival, he would not return home for two or three days. He would sit individually with many of the sadhus and listen to their teachings. His trips to Vartal became more and more frequent. His relatives became concerned. Would Dungar leave home for good?

Dungar was in search of an enlightened and scholarly guru. He had resolved that after finding such a guru, he would leave aside his worldly ties and become a sadhu.

On 14 April 1881, the full-moon day of the month of Chaitra, Samvat 1937, a grand festival was to be celebrated in Vartal. Groups of Swaminarayan sadhus from all over the country were coming to attend. Of the many who had already arrived, the sadhus

from Surat, led by Sadguru Vignanand Swami, stood out from the rest. Their saintliness attracted the attention of all.

Vignananand Swami had stayed with Shriji Maharaj for twelve years. He had pleased Shriji Maharaj and attained many virtues, including the virtues of dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya*, and bhakti. In addition, he was a profound scholar of the shastras and a master of classical music.

One after another, Dungar sat with the sadhus to get to know them. Finally, he came to Vignananand Swami. After having his darshan, Dungar sat down in front of him. While listening to his discourses, Dungar experienced peace within. He was certain that all of his spiritual goals would be fulfilled by staying with this great sadhu. He resolved there and then to make Vignananand Swami his guru.

Vignananand Swami, too, perceived an extraordinary spiritual fire within Dungar. He thought to himself, "If this youngster becomes a sadhu, he is surely capable of carrying forth our lineage of spiritual knowledge." With this belief, he asked, "Son, do you want to become a sadhu?"

"Yes."The intense spiritual zeal trapped in Dungar's heart escaped from his lips.

At that moment, a bond of spiritual affinity formed between the guru and his new disciple. Both shared a common experience – a feeling of fulfillment. Dungar now wished more than ever to accompany Swami after the celebrations. However, afraid that his father would protest, he returned to Mahelav with his family.

After a few days, Dungar quietly set out for Vartal. He had heard that today was the day that Swami would return to Surat. Dungar planned to accompany him before anyone could object. However, upon reaching Vartal, Dungar received some unfortunate news. Due to an unexpected turn of events, Swami would have to leave a day late. That one day of waiting in Vartal spoiled Dungar's plans. Noticing Dungar's disappearance, his father immediately came to Vartal and took him home.

7. Only the Brave Can Tread the Path of God

Dungar Bhakta demonstrates how to tell the mala

Dungar found life at home difficult. He lost interest in his work at the farm. He would often utter in despair, "Swami... Swami..." He mingled less with his family and spent more time at the mandir. All that he thought about was being with his guru. Six or seven months passed in this way and Dhoribhai began to worry about Dungar's unhappiness.

One day, Dungar slipped out of the house and headed for Vartal. From there, he reached Surat. Here, he stayed for some time with Vignananand Swami, who was the Mahant of Surat mandir. When Dhoribhai found out where Dungar was, he went to Surat and brought him back to Vartal.

Dhoribhai took Dungar before Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj. To stop Dungar from returning to Surat, Dhoribhai complained, "Your sadhu is spoiling my child."

Acharya Maharaj scolded Dungar, “Do you want to get one of our sadhus thrown in jail? Do not come back here to become a sadhu!”

Dungar’s dreams were shattered before his eyes. Seeing his dismay, the *kothari* of the mandir consoled him, told him not to worry, and advised, “Come back after two or three days.”

Dungar Bhakta discourses on detachment to his father

After a few days, Dungar returned to Vartal. When Acharya Maharaj noticed him, he immediately summoned Dungar and said, “Show us what you learned from Swami while in Surat.”

Dungar sat with his legs crossed. He closed his eyes and began chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. Acharya Maharaj was pleased with Dungar’s concentration and devotion. He addressed the sadhus seated in the assembly, “You should all learn to do

mala in this way."

Acharya Maharaj saw in Dungar, an intelligent and focused young man, and a perfect candidate to help him manage his personal affairs. He was tempted to keep him in his services. He told Dungar, "Become a *parshad* and stay with me."

"Maharaj, I want to go to Surat and stay in Swami's service," Dungar replied with humility.

Meanwhile, his father, guessing that Dungar must have run off again to Vartal, came looking for him. Seeing Dungar, Dhoribhai again took him back home.

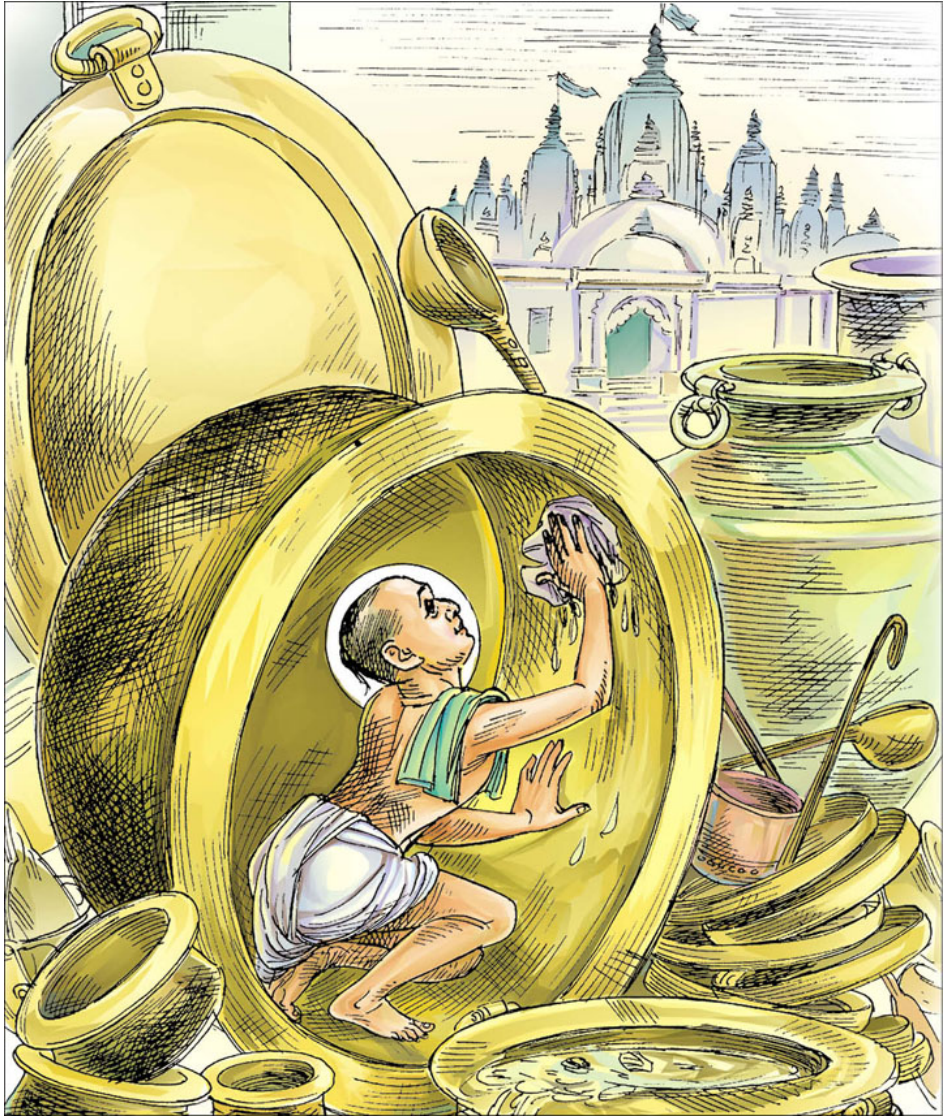
On the way back to Mahelav, Dungar decided that it was now time to address his father directly. He spoke extensively to Dhoribhai about detachment from the world. He explained that the family ties of this world were false and would one day perish. Dungar's powerful words pierced through his father's stubborn emotions and enlightened him, driving away his false material hopes.

Dhoribhai's moist eyes now beheld Dungar in a different light. He bowed before him. The following day, when he approached Dungar, Dhoribhai spoke affectionately, "You have come into this world to worship God and to inspire others to worship God. You will not be able to live a worldly life at home. Please, always cast your blessings on us."

Dhoribhai addressed a letter to Vignananand Swami giving Dungar permission to become a sadhu. As he wrote, his memory drifted back to Dungar's childhood, and Gunatitanand Swami's words came to mind.

It was December 1882 (Maghshar, Samvat 1938). Dungar, with the speed of an arrow shooting out of a bow, finally darted off to join his guru in Surat.

8. Renunciation



Dungar Bhakta cleaning the big untensils

Eager to meet Vignananand Swami, Dungar, accompanied by Vitthaldas Sheth, arrived at the railway station in Boriavi, near Anand. Hearing that Viharilalji Maharaj would be coming to Vadodara, Dungar went straight there. Whenever Viharilalji Maharaj arrived in such a big city, there would always be a grand festival. Sadhus from throughout the country would come. Dungar had guessed that Vignananand Swami would surely accompany Viharilalji Maharaj. He was right. Here, when he finally met his guru, his joy knew no bounds.

Gordhanbhai Kothari had also come to Vadodara. In Dungar, he too saw a dynamic young man who could ably shoulder many of his responsibilities. He was tempted to keep him.

“Stay in my service. There is so much work that you can help me with,” he

proposed.

Dungar politely refused,"I have only been given permission to stay in the service of Vignananand Swami, so I will stay only with him."

The following day, Viharilalji Maharaj noticed Dungar. He was pleased with Dungar's determination, however, he did not want Dungar's father to cause trouble. He asked, "Why have you come here again?"

The inquiry frightened Dungar. What if Viharilalji Maharaj did not let him stay? He immediately disclosed his worries to Vignananand Swami. Swami assured him, "Do not worry. You have come with a written permission. He will surely let you stay."

Relieved of his greatest worry, Dungar became fully engaged in *seva*. When people saw Dungar engaged in various duties throughout the day, they would stop and watch in admiration. Seeing little Dungar climb into and scrub gigantic cooking vessels and pots, some at least twice his own size, brought a smile to everyone's face. Everyone marveled at his devotional service.

After the festivities, Viharilalji Maharaj told Dungar to travel with Devanand Brahmachari in the region of Kanam to help collect donations. During their travels, they would stay in the village mandir. Here, Dungar would sweep the mandir grounds, fill water from the well for drinking and cooking, and assist in preparing meals. Moreover, he would sing kirtans and deliver discourses late into the night. The next morning he would wake up early and engage in constant *seva*. This hectic routine began to take a toll on his health, but Dungar ignored his fatigue and continued with his busy schedule.

One early morning, after bathing in the frigid waters of the Dhadhar River, his body could not bear the shivering cold and he fell down unconscious. When he regained consciousness, Devanand Brahmachari gently advised him, "You shouldn't strain yourself so much. Don't take a bath so early in the morning when it is so cold. Wake up a little later for your bath"

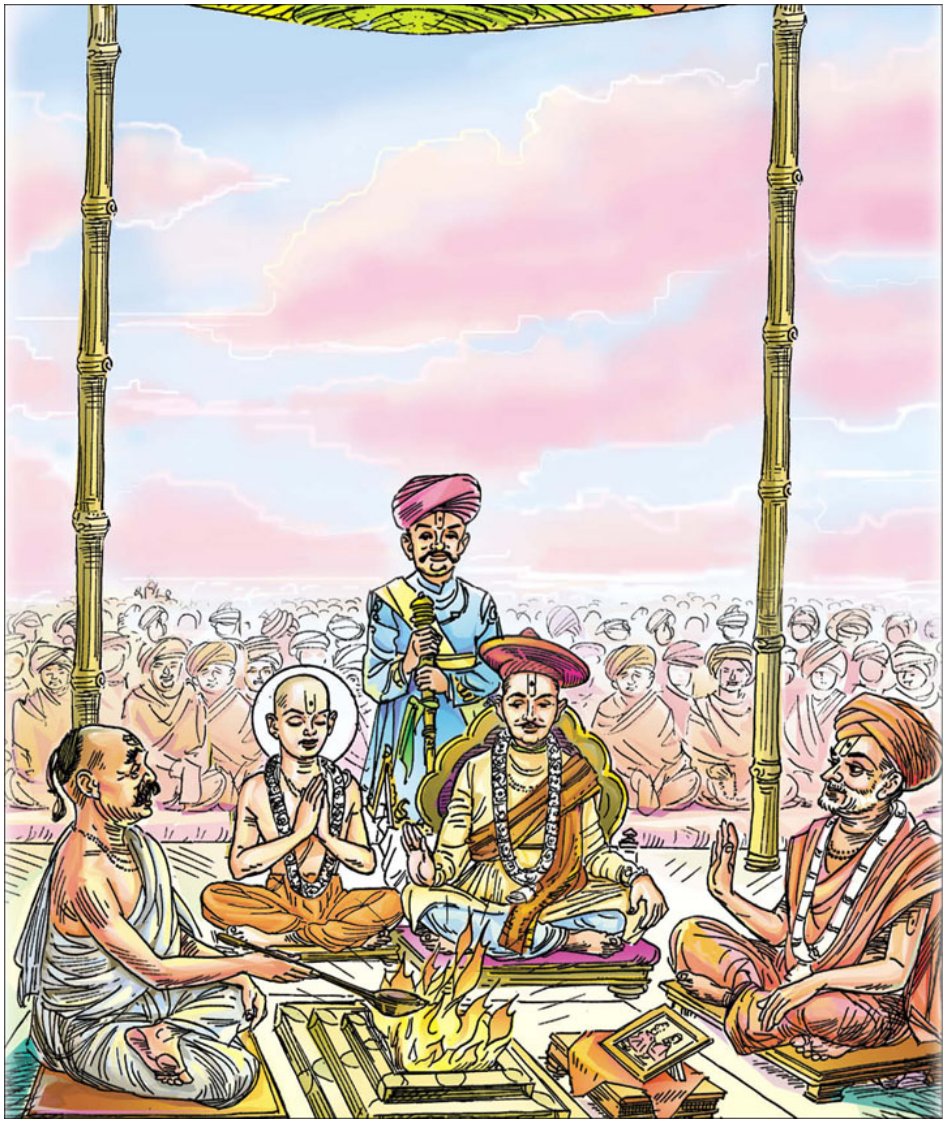
In this way, Dungar's enthusiasm for *seva* won the hearts of all. After three months, he was finally called to Surat.

In Surat, Vignananand Swami told him to serve in the mandir administration. Dungar performed this duty with meticulous attention to detail. He would also keep precise records of the mandir's accounts. In addition, he regularly listened to discourses given by sadhus. Not only Swami, but all the devotees of Surat were pleased with Dungar's skill and intellect. He had won their trust and respect. Slowly, Swami began to shift his own responsibilities onto Dungar in order to retire from overlooking the mandir affairs.

Even with such a heavy workload, Dungar still found time to study regularly under Vignananand Swami. He completed all of his lessons on time. Within just four months, he completed the study of Sarasvat.

Such was his zeal to do *seva*, affection for the devotees, and care not to waste mandir resources! It was no surprise that people began to feel that he was the *kothari* of the mandir. Swami's tremendous blessings carried Dungar forward.

9. Initiation as a Sadhu



Initiation ceremony of Dungar Bhakta into a sadhu

Dungar was now eager to receive *bhagvati diksha,* initiation as a sadhu. Vignananand Swami, too, was eager to arrange for his initiation. After all, a disciple so completely detached from the world, like Dungar, was hard to find.

On 15 November 1882 (Kartik *sud* 5, Samvat 1939), Adbhutanand Swami, a *paramhansa* from the time of Shriji Maharaj, passed away. Many sadhus arrived in Vartal to pay their respects during his final rites. Vignananand Swami, accompanied by Dungar, also came. After the ceremony, Swami requested Viharilalji Maharaj to initiate Dungar as a sadhu.

Viharilalji Maharaj, however, also wanted an assistant who was as skilled and clever as Dungar. Since initiating him as a sadhu would ruin any chance of convincing Dungar to stay with him, Viharilalji Maharaj refused Vignananand Swami's request saying, "He hasn't even completed the required one year as a *parshad* so there is no need to rush in initiating him."

Swami was stunned, yet he appealed,"But there was an extra month last year according to the lunar calendar. Therefore, he actually has been a *parshad* for twelve months." Viharilalji Maharaj, however, paid no heed to his plea.

Disappointed by this turn of events, Vignananand Swami requested Gordhanbhai Kothari to help him. Gordhanbhai also pressured Acharya Maharaj. Finally, several senior sadhus appealed to Viharilalji Maharaj on Swami's behalf, "It is not right to upset a senior sadhu like Vignananand Swami, who has stayed with Shriji Maharaj himself. Thus you should fulfil his request and initiate Dungar Bhakta."

Viharilalji Maharaj finally agreed to give Dungar *bhagvati diksha*. He acknowledged that this was no ordinary occasion. Thus, he arranged for a grand ceremony and *yagna* for the day of initiation. On 29 November 1882, (Kartik *vad* 5, Samvat 1939), amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj initiated Dungar Bhakta into the sadhu order and named him 'Yagnapurushdasji'.

That evening, Viharilalji Maharaj summoned a learned astrologer to examine the *janmakshar* of the newly initiated sadhus. Examining the *janmakshar* of Yagnapurushdasji, the astrologer revealed, "This sadhu is a manifestation of God in the form of a great yogi. He will be a very great sadhu."

These words delighted all who were present.

10. Meeting Bhagatji Maharaj

"Sadhuram...the enlightened has innumerable eyes."

Yagnapurushdasji now returned to Surat. He resumed serving his guru and the mandir. In the month of Fagan, there was a grand festival in Surat. The *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj was to be consecrated in the mandir. Acharya Maharaj, as well as sadhus and devotees from different regions arrived for the ceremony. Bhagatji Maharaj, also known as Pragji Bhakta, came from Mahuva.

Bhagatji Maharaj discoursed continuously. Thousands of sadhus and devotees would sit and listen with great concentration.

Yagnapurushdasji would go to the seats of the senior sadhus to listen to their teachings. Once, seeing a large crowd seated around Bhagatji Maharaj, Yagnapurushdasji, too, sat in the assembly.

Bhagatji's discourses seemed different from anything Yagnapurushdasji had ever

heard. Surprisingly, Bhagatji, a tailor by profession, would continue stitching clothes as he spoke. Each and every devotee listened carefully, making sure not to miss a word. They sat motionless, their eyes gleaming with joy as Bhagatji talked.

Yagnapurushdasji, amazed by what he was witnessing, wondered to himself, "He seems to be someone extraordinary. How is he able to speak with such spiritual depth and stitch at the same time?"

Reading his mind, Pragji Bhakta said, "Sadhuram! All living creatures have two eyes. Scholars are said to have three. Those who are righteous have seven. But a *gnani*, one who possesses true knowledge, has countless eyes. So, I can see with my fingers. I can see with my back. I can see from everywhere."

Astonished that Bhagatji had read his mind, Yagnapurushdasji thought to himself, "How did he know what I was thinking? He is certainly someone great." Something unexplainable drew Yagnapurushdasji to Bhagatji Maharaj.

Within a short period of time, Bhagatji's words moved Yagnapurushdasji. He discovered that Bhagatji Maharaj was a disciple who had been blessed immensely by his guru, Gunatitanand Swami. Yagnapurushdasji had often heard of Swami's greatness. Today, for the first time, he experienced that greatness through Bhagatji. He accepted Bhagatji Maharaj as his guru.

During the day, Yagnapurushdasji would be busy serving in the festival. In the evening, however, he would sit before Bhagatji, listening to his teachings late into the night. Then he would return to his seat. Unable to hold his enthusiasm, he would wake up Ramratandas, his companion sadhu, and repeat everything that he had heard from Bhagatji. Before he realized, it would be four in the morning, time for everyone to go and bathe in the Tapi River. Sometimes, when he did find free time during the day, he would sit and discuss spiritual matters with Vignandas Swami and Prabhudas Kothari, both senior disciples of Bhagatji Maharaj. Such was Yagnapurushdasji's eagerness to gain spiritual knowledge.

11. The Path of Brahmavidya

Once, Bhagatji Maharaj had Vachanamrut, Loya 12 read out loud. He explained the concept of becoming *aksharrup* and developing firm conviction in Purushottam. Gunatitanand Swami was the personified form of that Akshar and we must become like him. Only when one obeys and pleases a Brahmaswarup Satpurush does one become *aksharrup* and develop utmost conviction in Purushottam. Yagnapurushdasji now understood the essence of true *upasana*.

One evening, the devotees of Surat asked Vignananand Swami, "Swami, how do we achieve utmost conviction?"

As Vignananand Swami replied to the question, he looked at Yagnapurushdasji. He knew that Yagnapurushdasji would not be satisfied with the answer. Thus, he promised to answer the question in more detail at a later time.

"The answer to this question lies in Vachanamrut, Loya 12," remarked Yagnapurushdasji. He then repeated the explanation that Bhagatji Maharaj had given.

Vignananand Swami was extremely pleased with this young sadhu. He exclaimed, "Sadhuram! Pragji Bhakta is a Satpurush possessing Brahmastithi. He has learned the essence and the actual principles of all two-hundred and sixty-two Vachanamrut discourses from Gunatitanand Swami. Without a doubt, his explanations of Shriji Maharaj's principles are the truth. As you have developed affection for him, see to it that you fully cultivate that affection. Always keep his company."

Hearing of Bhagatji Maharaj's greatness from Swami, Yagnapurushdasji was overjoyed.

During the months of Chaturmas, Kapilmuni, Ghanshyamdas and Vignandas came to Surat. They were all sadhus who faithfully supported Bhagatji Maharaj. In their spiritual discussions, they often hinted that Shriji Maharaj was the Supreme God. Thus, Yagnapurushdasji asked Vignananand Swami, "In the Vachanamrut, Maharaj himself states that he has incarnated through Nar-Narayan. These sadhus claim that Shriji Maharaj is the Supreme God. What is the truth?"

Vignananand Swami replied, "While in Gadhada, I have myself heard Shriji Maharaj say that he himself is Supreme God. Therefore, you too should understand him to be so."

Yagnapurushdasji now firmly understood Shriji Maharaj to be Supreme God and Gunatitanand Swami to be Akshar.

Yagnapurushdasji indeed enjoyed Bhagatji's company. He utilized any free time in his schedule to listen to Bhagatji's discourses. Seeing his affection for Bhagatji, several sadhus became jealous.

They thought, "Yagnapurushdasji, the disciple of a 'nand' sadhu like Vignananand Swami, roams after and listens to the discourses of Pragji Bhakta, a mere householder. If he continues to do so, he will lower the prestige of sadhus. Who will respect our authority in the future?"

They addressed Acharya Maharaj, setting their terms, "You must choose. Either Bhagatji stays here or we stay here." To avoid trouble, Acharya Maharaj commanded Bhagatji to stay a few days and then depart from Surat.

Now, Vignananand Swami prompted Yagnapurushdasji to start reading and giving discourses on scriptures such as the Dharmamrut, Hari Gita, and Vasudev Mahatmya. Swami also started teaching him from the Bhagvat. That evening, Vignananand Swami fell ill. Within a few days, his condition worsened. Yagnapurushdasji now personally stayed in Swami's service day and night. Late at night on Jeth *vad* 11 (Ekadashi), everyone saw Shriji Maharaj and his sadhus arriving in a golden chariot.

The following morning, Yagnapurushdasji informed Swami, "Shriji Maharaj has been here since four o'clock in the morning. He wishes to take you to Akshardham." For half an hour, Swami's eyes rested affectionately on Yagnapurushdasji. On the morning of the twelfth, Vignananand Swami left his physical body for Akshardham. Yagnapurushdasji, as well as all of Swami's disciples, were grieved by Swami's passing.

On the day of Prabhodini Ekadashi (Ashadh *sud* 11), Yagnapurushdasji went to

Vartal. He took with him all the sanctified relics of Shriji Maharaj which had been preserved by Vignananand Swami. He presented them to the mandir in Vartal, thereby pleasing Acharya Maharaj.

12. Like a Favourite Son

Bhagatji Maharaj had also come to Vartal. Yagnapurushdasji enjoyed the privilege of his company. Acharya Maharaj also cherished staying with Bhagatji Maharaj. After the Ekadashi festival, he told Bhagatji to stay for a month. Many sadhus, who were fond of Bhagatji, sat and listened to his discourses. Bhagatji knew that other sadhus who envied him would cause trouble. Thus, he never allowed his disciples, with the exception of Yagnapurushdasji, to sit in his discourses. Narayancharandas once asked, "You tell everyone else to leave, but why don't you ever tell Yagnapurushdasji to leave?"

Bhagatji replied, "He is like a favourite son, so he will seat. Do not compare yourself to him." Bhagatji's words revealed his affection for Yagnapurushdasji.

Vignananand Swami had kept a pair of Shriji Maharaj's *charanarvind*. After Swami passed away, these *charanarvind* were passed on to Swami's leading disciple, Yagnapurushdasji. Ramratandas wanted these charanarvind for himself. He asked Bhagatji to tell Yagnapurushdasji to give up the *charanarvind*. Upon Bhagatji's request, Yagnapurushdasji immediately gave the *charanarvind* to Ramratandas. Bhagatji Maharaj was very pleased. How could anyone part with such a priceless possession? Yagnapurushdasji revealed his obedience to his guru.

When Acharya Maharaj learned of what had happened, he scolded Bhagatji, "You do not understand the practical affairs of Satsang. Vignananand Swami's pair of *charanarvind* must remain with his successor. Only with these *charanarvind*, will sadhus stay with him."

Bhagatji replied, "I will give him the very Shriji Maharaj who has imprinted these *charanarvind*. Thereafter, many sadhus will stay with him, so do not worry."

Over time, Acharya Maharaj marked Yagnapurushdasji's sharp intellect and ability to clearly explain spiritual principles. He was convinced that if Yagnapurushdasji studied further, he would further advance the prestige of the Sampraday. Acharya Maharaj expressed his wish to Bhagatji Maharaj.

Bhagatji replied, "You educate him in the study of the shastras, I will teach him *brahmavidya*." They both agreed that Yagnapurushdasji should now commence the study of Siddhant Kaumudi.

However, Yagnapurushdasji now often listened to the discourses of Vignandas Swami, one of Bhagatji's leading disciples. As a result, he was drawn even more to Bhagatji and concentrated less on his studies. He spent more time on meditation and worship and so Bhagatji began to give Yagnapurushdasji darshan in his dreams.

Around this time, Vignandas Swami had come to the village of Sojitra.

Yagnapurushdasji would go to Sojitra every evening and listen all night to his discourses. Vignandas and all of Bhagatji's sadhu disciples remained constantly engrossed in meditation, worship, spiritual discourses, and *seva*. They ate only plain meals. Their virtuous ways impressed the devotees of the entire region. Everyone understood their greatness.

13. Bond of Love Between Guru and Disciple

Jaga Bhakta arrived from Junagadh to attend the Ram Navmi celebrations in Vartal. Yagnapurushdasji spent a great deal of time with him and pleased him by doing his *seva*.

Meanwhile, Bhagatji Maharaj had arrived at Chansad in the Gujarat region. Some devotees were going for Bhagatji's darshan. With them, Yagnapurushdasji sent two gifts for Bhagatji. He sent a *tumbdi* which had been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj and a garland of jasmine buds which had been offered to Harikrishna Maharaj.

Arriving in Chansad, Dajibhai met Bhagatji Maharaj and delivered these gifts on Yagnapurushdasji's behalf. Delighted by Yagnapurushdasji's devotion, Bhagatji affectionately exclaimed, "Oh, how wonderful indeed, Yagnapurushdasji, how wonderful indeed! You have troubled yourself so much for this Pragji Bhakta!"

From Chansad, Bhagatji came to Vartal. There, Yagnapurushdasji and Bhagatji's other disciples continuously spoke of Bhagatji Maharaj's glory. They emphasized to all the need to achieve oneness with Bhagatji. However, many envious sadhus did not like this.

They complained to Bhagatji Maharaj, "These sadhus of yours are out of control. Day and night they preach about your greatness. They claim that you hold the key to Akshardham and that you are the gateway to liberation. In every corner and under every tree of Vartal, they sing your glory. This is not appropriate."

Bhagatji replied, "I will speak to them."

When they complained specifically about Yagnapurushdasji, Bhagatji replied, "He is still young. But, I will scold the others."

The following day, Bhagatji left for Nadiad. Yagnapurushdasji and Bhaktijivandas walked with him, listening to his teachings. Just then, Bhagatji told them, "Both of you are guilty of excessively praising Pragji Bhakta. Therefore, go back to Vartal, apologize to and appease the sadhus in front of the general assembly."

Both sadhus returned to Vartal. They prostrated to the sadhus in the assembly and apologized to them. By evening, they arrived in Nadiad to meet Bhagatji.

Vignandas Swami and the other sadhus had also arrived in Nadiad. The following day, Bhagatji told them to go to Vartal and apologize.

"Will Yagnapurushdasji also come with us?" asked one sadhu.

"He has already paid in advance with interest. Why should he go again?" replied Bhagatji, siding with Yagnapurushdasji who had already apologized before coming to

Nadiad.

As Bhagatji Maharaj and his disciples became more popular, the opposition against them increased. Bhagatji's sadhus would speak of the differences between a true and a false sadhu, thereby exposing pretentious sadhus in the public eye. Day by day, the hostility of other Vartal sadhus towards Bhagatji's sadhus increased. Bhagatji's sadhus were harassed in many ways. Once, Yagnapurushdasji was doing darshan of the *murtis* in Vartal mandir. One sadhu stabbed him from behind with a large needle. Another sadhu started to kick him. Yagnapurushdasji tolerated everything patiently. He didn't say a word to anyone and continued with his activities. Such tolerance won the respect of many devotees. This evoked even more hostility from those who opposed Bhagatji.

14. Bhagatji: The Param Ekantik Satpurush

After celebrating the Ramnavmi festival in Vartal, Yagna-purushdasji, Vignandas, and the other sadhus went to Mahuva via Gadhada. Purani Raghuvircharandas accommodated Yagnapurushdasji and Keshavprasaddas in the Mahuva mandir.

The next day an assembly was held in the presence of Bhagatji Maharaj. Hoping to reveal the spiritual understanding of the sadhus, several devotees asked them questions. One such question was: "Who do you understand Pragji Bhakta to be?"

Mahapurushdas replied, "We believe him to be an Ekantik Bhakta."

Fulchandbhai asked Mahapurushdas to explain using references from the Vachanamrut. When Mahapurushdas did not reply, Narayancharandas answered, "We believe Bhagatji to have the qualities of a Satpurush as described in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 27."

"What qualities are mentioned in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 27?" asked Vitthalbhai.

The devotees waited for an answer, but Narayancharandas remained silent. Yagnapurushdasji knew that the perfect opportunity had presented itself. He could openly reveal Bhagatji's true glory to all. At the request of Bhagatji Maharaj, Yagnapurushdasji finally addressed the devotees.

"We believe Pragji Bhakta to be the Ekantik Satpurush as described in the Vachanamrut." Yagnapurushdasji then continued to describe the qualities of an Ekantik Satpurush stated in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 27, that such an Ekantik Satpurush possesses dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya*, and bhakti and that Shriji Maharaj does not remain away from him for even a moment.

The divinity in Yagnapurushdasji's voice and his ability to cite exact references from the Vachanamrut convinced all of Bhagatji's saintliness. They understood the principle that Shriji Maharaj did not at all remain away from such a person. They acknowledged that Bhagatji's sadhus were indeed matchless in spiritual knowledge and in their love for their guru. Everyone was now aware of Bhagatji's enlightened state.

Bhagatji too was very pleased with Yagnapurushdasji's ability to explain on the basis of shastras. He placed his hand on Yagnapurushdasji's head and blessed him.

Thereafter, the sadhus returned to Vartal.

15. A Thakario Scorpion

Rangacharya teaches Sanskrit to Yagnapurushdasji and other students

From Vartal, Yagnapurushdasji went to Thasra. There he delighted the devotees with his spiritual discourses. Next, he arrived in Dabhoi.

Purani Morlidhardas, who disliked Bhagatji Maharaj, stayed in Dabhoi. Yagnapurushdasji, through his discourses, removed Morlidhardas' aversion for Bhagatji. He explained Bhagatji's greatness to him.

When Bhagatji Maharaj learned of Yagnapurushdasji's feats, he exclaimed, "Yagnapurushdasji is like a Thakario scorpion. Wherever he goes, spiritual aspirants are struck by his stinging spiritual discourses. He introduces the manifest God and Sadhu to them."

The devotees in Dabhoi were also delighted with Yagnapurushdasji's discourses.

Purani Morlidhardas exclaimed, "Well done, Yagnapurushdasji, Well done! Through your discourses, you have brought me peace within. In all my years, I have never before heard such brilliant discourses. You have surpassed all our expectations. You have removed our obstinancy, ego, and jealousy."

Even in a fully packed assembly at the mandir, Morlidhardas, a very senior sadhu, started to offer *dandvats* before Yagnapurushdasji. Immediately, Yagnapurushdasji stopped him.

Yagnapurushdasji now resumed his studies in Vartal. However, there were no competent scholars nearby available to teach. Yagnapurushdasji went to Vadodara. There, he started his study of Siddhant Kaumudi from the great scholar, Rangacharya. Yagnapurushdasji's sharp intellect, powerful memory, and intense desire to study earned him Rangacharya's respect. He often spoke to Rangacharya about Bhagatji's greatness. He explained that Bhagatji possessed all of the characteristics of Brahman. Thus, Rangacharya eagerly wished for Bhagatji's darshan.

16. A Matchless Scholar

A debate between Mahidhar Shastri and Yagnapurushdas in Lakshmi Vadi

Shriji Maharaj's body had been cremated in Lakshmi Vadi, which was Dada Khachar's farm in Gadhada. A mandir had been built over the cremation site in memory of Maharaj. Bhagatji Maharaj arrived in Gadhada for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the Lakshmi Vadi mandir.

Yagnapurushdasji, accompanied by Rangacharya, also left for Gadhada. They first arrived in Bhavnagar. There, Yagnapurushdasji defeated a teacher of the Shankar school of thought in debate. From there, they arrived in Gadhada. Here, Yagnapurushdasji introduced Bhagatji Maharaj to Rangacharya.

Rangacharya was overjoyed to finally have Bhagatji's darshan. He was convinced that Bhagatji was indeed the enlightened Sadhu that Yagnapurushdasji had described.

Great *sadgurus*, who strongly believed in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, arrived

from Junagadh for the ceremony. Yagnapurushdasji took the devotees who had come from Gujarat region to meet these *sadgurus*. Listening to their discourses strengthened the conviction in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* within the devotees. They were now also convinced of Bhagatji's *brahmasthiti*.

After the *murti-pratishtha*, a great assembly was held in the evening at Lakshmi Vadi. Many scholars came as guests, one of them being the renowned Vedanti scholar from Rajkot, Shri Mahidhar Shastri.

Mahidhar Shastri challenged the scholars of the Sampraday to a debate on the shastras. But no one dared to debate with such a powerful scholar. Everyone looked to each other, not knowing what to do.

Yagnapurushdasji thought to himself, "If no one accepts the challenge, the reputation of the Sampraday will suffer." He himself came forward.

Seeing such a young sadhu daring to stand before him in debate, Mahidhar Shastri laughed.

Rangacharya, however, defended his disciple, "*Gunāhā pujāsthānam gunishu na cha lingam na cha vayaha*" (Only the virtues of the virtuous are revered, not their gender or their age).

The debate started with Mahidhar Shastri asking questions. Yagnapurushdasji would answer each question and weaken Mahidhar Shastri's arguments. He would then establish his own principles. As the debate continued, Mahidhar Shastri found that his arguments were slowly being depleted. Finally, he admitted defeat and bowed before Yagnapurushdasji.

Acharya Maharaj, Bhagatji Maharaj, Rangacharya, and all who were present marvelled at Yagnapurushdasji's feat. Bhagatji continued to gaze affectionately at his favourite disciple.

The following day, Yagnapurushdasji went to meet Bhagatji Maharaj. Bhagatji saw him coming and immediately sat up.

"Welcome Sadhuji!" he said as he hugged Yagnapurushdasji, "May you always happily worship God."

After the celebrations, Bhagatji returned to Mahuva. Yagnapurushdasji returned to Vadodara. While Yagnapurushdasji stayed at the Vadodara mandir for his studies, he always sat and talked to devotees and college students about Akshar and Purushottam.

One afternoon, Jethabhai from the village of Pij came to the mandir to meet Yagnapurushdasji. After doing darshan of Thakorji, both of them walked casually to the mandir's *pradakshina*. They sat there discussing spiritual matters. Yagnapurushdasji was so absorbed in speaking, and Jethabhai in listening, that both lost track of time. Only when the clock struck four, did they realize that it was almost morning. They had been talking for twelve hours!

After this incident, Jethabhai developed a firm conviction in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He also understood Bhagatji's greatness. Jethabhai later took *diksha* and became Nirgundas Swami.

Yagnapurushdasji was perhaps the most outstanding of Rangacharya's disciples. Not only did Yagnapurushdasji learn the knowledge latent in each shastra, but he also

pulled out any references that he could find to support the concepts of devotion and Akshar-Purushottam. He also cited references from the shastras to slowly weaken Rangacharya's allegiance to the Shankar school of thought.

In Yagnapurushdasji, Rangacharya had met a sadhu abundant in both knowledge and devotion. Yagnapurushdasji's presence brought Rangacharya a feeling of joy that he had never experienced before. Rangacharya would often exclaim, "*Asmin Sampradāye ekameva*. Yagnapurushdasji is the one and only in our Sampraday."

17. A Broom for Inner Cleansing

During the Jaljhilani festival, Bhagatji Maharaj advised Yagnapurushdasji that if Acharya Maharaj told him to study further, he should opt to study in Rajkot, rather than Kashi. Bhagatji then turned to the devotees and exclaimed, "This Yagnapurushdasji is a broom to internally cleanse you. Do you want to lose his company? If he goes afar to study, how will you do without him?"

Bhagatji advised Yagnapurushdasji to study in Rajkot for two reasons. Firstly, he would be able to study Sanskrit without having to go far away. Secondly, Jaga Bhakta, who had received tremendous blessings from Gunatitanand Swami, would be nearby in Junagadh; and Yagnapurushdasji also wished to benefit from the company of Jaga Bhakta.

Acharya Maharaj told Yagnapurushdasji to go to Rajkot and study. He wrote a letter ordering that arrangements be made for Yagnapurushdasji to stay at the Rajkot mandir while he studied.

Yagnapurushdasji arrived in Rajkot and resumed his studies. Jivanram Shastri, the son of Mahidhar Shastri, would come to the mandir to teach him. Although a great scholar, Jivanram was quite humble and accommodating. He was further humbled by Yagnapurushdasji's sharp intellect and scholarliness. Although Yagnapurushdasji was his student, Jivanram developed a divine reverence for him from within.

In Rajkot, Yagnapurushdasji would assist young devotees in their studies. He would speak to them about the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam. He won the hearts of many youths. During the festivals of Ekadashi and Punam, he would send these youths to Junagadh to listen to the discourses of Jaga Bhakta. Yagnapurushdasji himself often visited Junagadh.

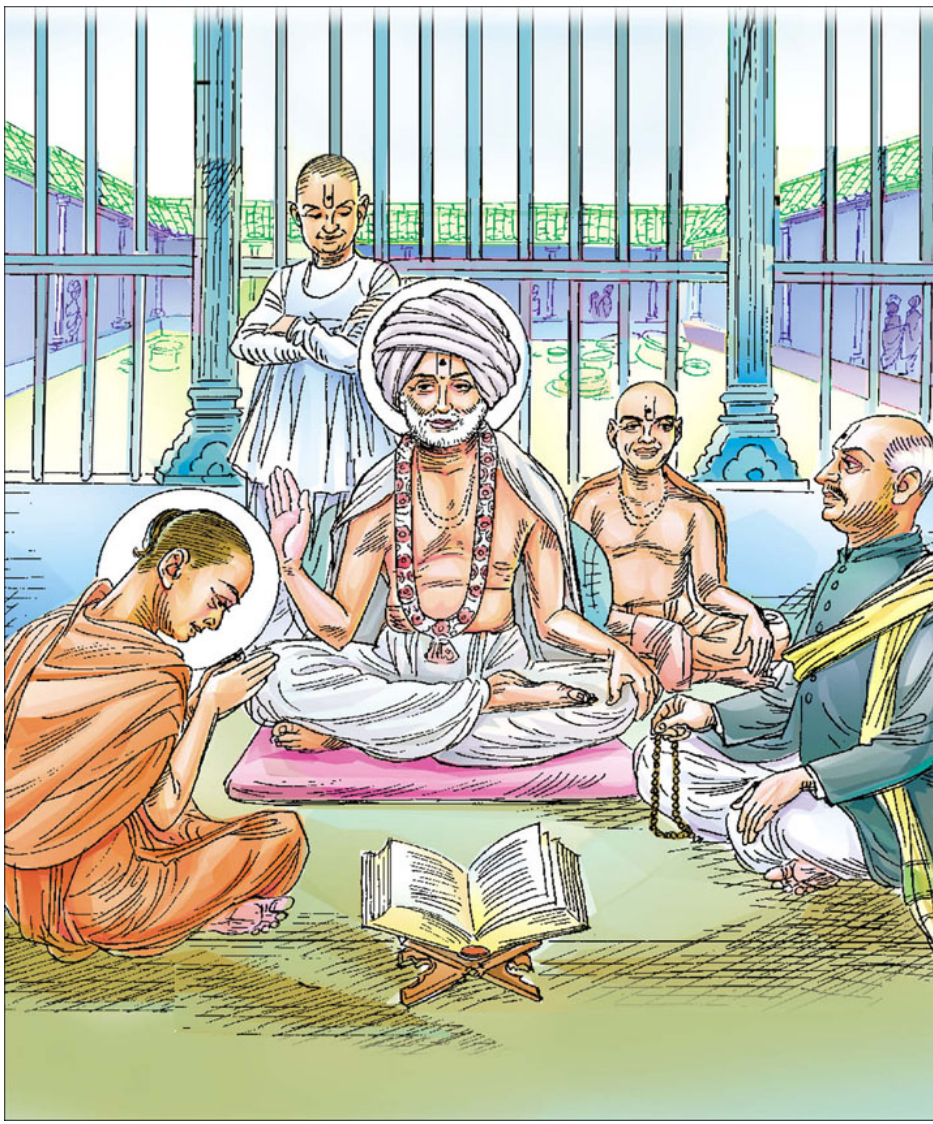
Yagnapurushdasji's youth activities alarmed many envious sadhus. Such sadhus would approach naive devotees, feeding them misleading lies, "This Shastri coaxes your sons into observing strict fasts. He needlessly sends them off to Junagadh. Many times, he makes them stay at the mandir without any reason. Stop your sons before he spoils them and makes them into sadhus."

These words provoked many naïve devotees. They prepared to insult Yagnapurushdasji. They started to complain about him in the general assembly. Sadguru Balmukund Swami responded, "Your sons now do *seva* at the mandir. They

sleep there at night. They listen to spiritual discourses. They observe strict fasts. Ask yourselves, have they been spoiled or have they improved? Think about what you are saying."

No one dared to speak against such a great *sadguru*. Yagnapurushdasji quietly sat, turning the beads of his *mala*.

18. The Blessings of Jaga Bhakta



"Always be pleased with me. Watch over me and bless me."

In Junagadh, many jealous sadhus could not bear to see so many devotees and great

sadgurus sitting before Jaga Bhakta's seat to listen to his discourses. They approached Jibhai, the Kothari of Junagadh mandir. They misled him, falsely accusing Jaga Bhakta. As a result, Jibhai declared that no one should visit Jaga Bhakta's seat or listen to his discourses. He also banned Jaga Bhakta from coming to speak in the general assembly. Meeting devotees and spreading the message of Akshar-Purushottam was all that Jaga Bhakta lived for. He was dismayed by Jibhai's ban.

News of the ban reached Yagnapurushdasji in Rajkot. He at once rushed to Junagadh. After doing darshan of Thakorji, he headed straight for Jaga Bhakta's room. People warned him on the way, "The Kothari has issued a ban. No one is allowed to go there."

"No ban applies to me," Yagnapurushdasji replied boldly as he reached Jaga Bhakta's room. He prostrated, respectfully touched his feet and then sat before Jaga Bhakta.

Surprised, Jaga Bhakta asked, "How did you come here? Coming here is forbidden."

"From today, this ban is over. Swami, do not be disheartened. I will convince the Kothari to lift the ban and allow you to discourse as before."

News of Yagnapurushdasji's visit to Jaga Bhakta's room quickly spread throughout the mandir. Yagnapurushdasji stayed a few days. Then, one night, Yagnapurushdasji privately spoke to Jibhai about Jaga Bhakta's greatness. As he listened to Yagnapurushdasji, Jibhai realized his mistake. In his heart, he truly repented his actions.

Early the next morning, Jibhai went to Jaga Bhakta's room. He prostrated and declared, "From today, everyone is free to visit your room. Please come to the general assembly to give discourses. Yagnapurushdasji has rid me of my ignorance. He has uplifted me." Jaga Bhakta, pleased by Jibhai's humble apology, blessed him.

After Jibhai left the room, Jaga Bhakta eagerly awaited the arrival of the very sadhu who had convinced Jibhai to lift the ban. Finally, Yagnapurushdasji arrived. He started to prostrate to Jaga Bhakta. At once, Jaga Bhakta stood up and said, "Come here! You've made me wait so much!" He firmly hugged Yagnapurushdasji for several minutes. Finally, Jaga Bhakta released his embrace and spoke about what had happened.

Jaga Bhakta could not hold back his joy. He affectionately addressed Yagnapurushdasji, "You have today opened the doors of liberation which had been sealed for many aspirants. Many souls will be liberated by listening to these discourses. You shall receive the merits of these discourses and of whatever good deeds I do from today."

Yagnapurushdasji humbly bowed and requested, "Always be pleased with me. Watch over me and bless me."

After witnessing such a valiant deed, everyone acknowledged that Yagnapurushdasji was without an equal in Satsang.

Yagnapurushdasji now left Junagadh. As he returned to Rajkot, a letter awaited him. Jibhai had written, "A *parayan* on the Satsangijivan shastra will soon be held here in Junagadh. Please come to read the discourses." Yagnapurushdasji again returned to

Junagadh.

19. A Great Speaker

The *parayan* had been sponsored by Harilal Sheth, the grandson of Shivlal Sheth. Four *puranis*, one of whom was Yagnapurushdasji, had been chosen to read the discourses. Yagnapurushdasji's turn to read came last. All were delighted by his unique style of reading, his thorough understanding of the Vachanamrut, and his ability to explain these verses using examples from the shastras.

On the second day of the *parayan*, someone went to invite Harilal Sheth to come and sit in the discourse. He immediately replied, "Call me only when Shastri Yagnapurushdasji sits to read."

Harilal's words angered many sadhus who were jealous of Yagnapurushdasji's popularity. On the final day of the *parayan*, the four *puranis* were to be traditionally honoured by a ceremonial *pujan*. However, who would be the first *purani* to be honoured? Harilal voiced his opinion, "He whose discourses have been most satisfying should be honoured first. Shastri Yagnapurushdasji's discourses have pleased everyone. Therefore, he should be honoured first."

These words irritated several sadhus. With the intention of maligning Yagnapurushdasji, Sadhu Ghanshyamdas remarked, "Today, one who is the disciple of a mere tailor and a cobbler is honoured in our assembly!"

Hearing this, Yagnapurushdasji roared back, "The right to become a guru has not been granted just to those who wear saffron. Both Pragji Bhakta and Jaga Bhakta received immense blessings from Gunatitanand Swami. You should not look towards their caste. Shriji Maharaj will not tolerate such behaviour."

Many great *sadguru* sadhus scolded Ghanshyamdas. Harilal Sheth came forth to first honour Yagnapurushdasji. However, Yagnapurushdasji humbly refused. Haridas, the senior of the four, was honoured first and Yagnapurushdasji was honoured last.

Yagnapurushdasji later returned to Rajkot to resume his studies. First, he studied Shankar's commentary on the Brahmasutra. Then he asked Jivanram to explain Ramanuja's commentary on these same Brahmasutra.

Jivanram replied, "I have not studied Ramanuja's commentary."

Yagnapurushdasji requested, "Then, explain the literal meanings of the original Sanskrit text to me. I will understand the commentary and its implied message by myself."

Thereafter, Yagnapurushdasji gave an interpretation of Ramanuja's commentary. As Jivanram listened, he developed more and more interest in Ramanuja's commentary. Yagnapurushdasji slowly changed Jivanram's allegiance to the Shankar philosophy. Jivanram now favoured the Ramanuja system of thought.

After Jivanram read Gopalanand Swami's commentary on the Gita, he became a firm believer of the Vishishtadvait philosophy. Yagnapurushdasji brought him before

Jaga Bhakta. Jivanram received *vartman* and became a devotee of the Sampraday. He was no longer the guru, but rather the disciple.

20. A True Disciple of a Guru

Yagnapurushdasji had tremendous devotion for Bhagatji Maharaj. Years ago, Bhagatji had been excommunicated without reason and sent away from the Junagadh mandir. Yagnapurushdasji now had one sole desire. He awaited Bhagatji's return to Junagadh. He wanted his guru to be welcomed back into this same Junagadh mandir with unprecedented honour and glory. Only then would he prove a true disciple to his guru.

Yagnapurushdasji asked Acharya Maharaj to invite Bhagatji for the Janmashtmi celebrations in Junagadh. Acharya Maharaj heeded his request and sent a letter summoning Bhagatji to the celebrations.

After the letter had been posted, Yagnapurushdasji informed all of Bhagatji's disciples of their guru's imminent arrival. Yagnapurushdasji had often spoken to Jibhai about Bhagatji's greatness. As suggested by Yagnapurushdasji, Jibhai decided to arrange the same magnificent welcome and the same facilities for Bhagatji Maharaj as would be arranged for Acharya Maharaj.

In 1866 (Samvat 1922), Bhagatji Maharaj had been ordered by Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj to leave Junagadh mandir. Now, at the behest of Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj, Bhagatji was being welcomed back.

A carriage pulled by two horses arrived for Acharya Maharaj. The same type of horse carriage came for Bhagatji Maharaj. A cot with silk and cotton quilts were also provided for Bhagatji. Bhagatji Maharaj, along with Acharya Maharaj, was welcomed with great honour and festivity.

During Bhagatji's stay, many devotees from the Gujarati region came to Junagadh. During the festival, Bhagatji spoke extensively about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Jaga Bhakta also gave many discourses. Bhagatji gave discourses and delighted all of the devotees who were present.

21. A Command to Liberate Jivas

From Junagadh, Bhagatji Maharaj went to Gondal. He came to the Akshar Deri for darshan and said, "Here, a great *arti* of thousands of lamps will take place and a great mandir will be constructed."

At night, Yagnapurushdasji asked about his own studies. Bhagatji replied, "Until now you have studied to become a Shastri. I too have completely taught you *brahmavidya*. Now, teach others to experience that same bliss which you yourself experience." So saying, Bhagatji told Yagnapurushdasji to liberate other souls and grant

them the bliss of God.

From Gondal, Bhagatji reached Mahuva. There he fell ill. Yagnapurushdasji, although eager to visit Bhagatji, could not come to Mahuva without Bhagatji's consent. Bhagatji Maharaj's illness worsened. On 7 November 1897 (Kartik *sud* 13, Samvat 1954) Bhagatji Maharaj left his body and returned to Akshardham.

In Rajkot, Swamishri (Yagnapurushdasji will be referred to as Swamishri or Shastriji Maharaj from here onwards) received a letter informing him of Bhagatji's passing away. Overwhelmed with sorrow, Swamishri thought to himself, "I didn't even meet him during his final moments. I could not even do his final *seva* and now Bhagatji is gone. He who was my life and soul is gone."

Swamishri sat by a nearby well grieving. Suddenly, he saw Bhagatji Maharaj standing before him. Bhagatji was holding a rose and jasmine garland in his hand. He garlanded Swamishri and said, "Why are you so disheartened? Have I really left you? I forever reside within you."

Swamishri was overjoyed by the sudden vision of his guru. He reached Junagadh and met Jaga Bhakta. Jaga Bhakta's soothing spiritual discourses relieved Swamishri of his sorrow. Swamishri now felt peace within.

Swamishri confided to Jaga Bhakta, "Swami, I regret that I could not go to Mahuva and serve Bhagatji in his final moments."

Jaga Bhakta was pleased with Swamishri's devotion for Bhagatji. He assured, "Do not be disheartened. I will call you for my final *seva* before I return to Akshardham." Jaga Bhakta's promise comforted Swamishri.

With time, Swamishri received more and more recognition within the Sampraday. Many sadhus, who found this intolerable, complained to Acharya Maharaj. Acharya Maharaj had no choice but to keep Swamishri near him. He called him back to Vartal from Rajkot. Swamishri's studies in Rajkot now came to an end.

In 1899 (Samvat 1955), Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj passed away. Soon thereafter, Gordhanbhai Kothari assigned Swamishri the task of managing the affairs of the Hanuman mandir in Sarangpur. Gordhanbhai appointed Prabhudas Kothari as Swamishri's assistant.

Bhimji Kothari of Gadhada, who until then had controlled the affairs of the mandir, now lost his authority. He was angered by the decision. He had always held an aversion for Bhagatji's followers. Now, he disliked Swamishri even more.

Many of the sacred sites of Sarangpur had become run-down over time. Swamishri renovated them. He also built a bungalow next to the mandir. After acquiring more land, he made the mandir larger and enhanced its beauty.

Bhagatji Maharaj's old disciples would often come to Sarangpur to meet Swamishri. They would donate generously to the mandir. With time, the financial condition of the mandir improved considerably. Indeed, Swamishri proved to be a capable manager of the mandir's affairs. Gordhanbhai was pleased with Swamishri's expertise.

In 1901 (Samvat 1957), Jaga Bhakta fell ill in the village of Dangra. He sent for Swamishri. Swamishri quickly reached Dangra. Jaga Bhakta had told his attendants beforehand to bring Swamishri to him immediately upon arrival. When Swamishri

finally came, Jaga Bhakta exclaimed warmly, “So you’ve come! You made me wait so much.” He then affectionately embraced Swamishri. Seeing Jaga Bhakta in such poor health distressed Swamishri.

Jaga Bhakta spoke, “I promised that I would call you for my final *seva*. Now I wish to go to Akshardham, so I have called you. My work here is done. Now you should start your mission. Further the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami will assist you in your efforts.”

Swamishri continuously served Jaga Bhakta for two days. On the night of 29 January 1901 (Maha *sud* 10, Samvat 1957) Jaga Bhakta passed away. Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, and several *akshar-muktas* arrived to take Jaga Bhakta to Akshardham. After performing the final rites, Swamishri returned to Sarangpur.

22. Inspiration from Sadhus

Accompanied by devotees from the Gujarat region, Swamishri left Sarangpur for a pilgrimage of the sacred sites in the Sorath region. When they arrived in Junagadh, Keshavjivandas, an 85-year-old disciple of Gopalanand Swami, spoke to Swamishri, “You have conviction in Gunatitanand Swami. You have also been blessed by the great, so please consecrate the *murtis* of both Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami. We wanted to do so in Gondal, but we were unable to.”

Swamishri replied, “If Balmukunddasji, who is a great *sadguru* and a disciple of Gunatitanand Swami, gives his consent, then I will do so.”

Balmukunddasji exclaimed, “Even if you consecrate golden *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami, I will be delighted.” These words strengthened Swamishri’s aspiration.

Earlier in Junagadh, Jaga Bhakta had told Swamishri, “You should consecrate the *murtis* of Maharaj and Swami in a *shikarbaddh* mandir.”

Swamishri had replied, “Even if I need one paisa postcard from the mandir stores, I have to plead. How then can I possibly build an entire mandir costing hundreds of thousands of rupees?”

Jaga Bhakta had advised, “It is Shriji Maharaj’s wish to establish the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, so work for this cause. If you do not aspire to do so, then you are at fault and if you do aspire and we fail to fulfil your wish, then we are at fault.”

Jaga Bhakta’s promise had motivated Swamishri. He was determined to see this task to completion. However, he had decided to be patient. He would begin his efforts when the time was right. Until then, Swamishri decided to instill an understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy within others. He visited the regions of Gujarat and Saurashtra, preaching to the devotees about Akshar-Purushottam. Be they young or old, all who had his darshan were drawn to him. All who listened to his discourses developed firm conviction in the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Neither fatigue nor the need for sleep deterred Swamishri from his work. He worked day and night for the

cause.

As Swamishri often travelled to the region of Gujarat, several sadhus, who disliked him, would complain, “Yagnapurushdasji neglects the work in Sarangpur and continues to wander needlessly around Gujarat. As a result, the state of the Sarangpur mandir suffers. His activities outside of Sarangpur must be controlled.”

However, the financial condition of Sarangpur mandir had improved considerably. The mandir’s renovations were progressing rapidly. Therefore, no one heeded these false complaints.

Meanwhile, the Acharya Maharaj of the Ahmedabad division passed away. The heir to the position of Acharya was to be Kunjvihariprasadji. However, the sadhus and devotees of Ahmedabad instead instated the three-year-old Vasudevprasadji as the new heir.

Several sadhus and devotees did not approve. Nirmaldas, Tyagvallabhdas, and several senior sadhus and devotees sided with Kunjvihariprasadji. They separated from the Ahmedabad division and settled in the village of Vadhwan. There, they established their own following and decided to build their own mandir. However, they lacked sufficient resources and manpower. They knew that they would be unable to resist the opposition. Only with the help of a powerful sadhu could they build such a mandir. But who would help them? They searched throughout the Sampraday. Finally, their eyes fell on Shastri Yagnapurushdasji.

Nirmaldas thought to himself, “Throughout the entire Sampraday there is only one who is so fearless. He is unparalleled. If he assists us, then we shall certainly succeed. Furthermore, his disciples are also faithful. They are willing to lay their lives for him. They are also capable of helping us with funds.”

Nirmaldas met Swamishri in the village of Limbdi. He requested Swamishri to help them build a mandir in Vadhwan.

Swamishri thought to himself, “Their cause is indeed true. Nirmaldasji is also a firm believer of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. We should surely assist them.”

Swamishri set his terms before Nirmaldas. He would help them only if they agreed to consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam. Nirmaldas agreed to Swamishri’s conditions. He pleaded that Swamishri use his contacts to help them acquire land for the mandir.

The Diwan of Limbdi was a disciple of Swamishri. Swamishri at once wrote him a letter. He emphasized the need for land in Vadhwan to build a mandir. The Diwan complied with his request and the land for the Vadhwan mandir was acquired.

23. Persecution Begins

Swamishri wished to stay in Vartal and spread the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Thus, he continuously gave discourses. He travelled to each village of the Gujarat region and spoke about Akshar-Purushottam. When devotees heard that Swamishri was

coming and that he would stay for several days, they would gather from all over the state of Gujarat. They were overjoyed to listen to Swamishri's discourses.

Once, Swamishri held discourses in Vadodara. During the evening session, Swamishri sang kirtans and spoke on the differences between a true and a false sadhu. Several such false sadhus were nearby. They already bore a grudge against Swamishri. Convinced that Swamishri was referring to themselves in his discourses, these sadhus were angered. They decided to interrupt the assembly.

They yelled, "Scoundrels! Sinners! At least now let us get some sleep!" They began to hurl abuse. Swamishri, however, continued with his discourses. The sadhus were now furious. They picked up bricks and started to throw them at the building adjacent to the mandir where the assembly was being held. The chaos that ensued awoke the neighbours.

The sadhus thought to themselves, 'This is our chance to finish off Yagnapurushdasji. Let us burn down the entire building. He shall never trouble us again." They prepared to set the building on fire.

Next door, the mother of Jay Shankar, a little boy sitting in the assembly, was awakened by the commotion. She began to scream. She pleaded for someone to save her son.

Amidst the commotion, not a trace of fear could be seen on Swamishri's face. He sat unfazed and said, "Whatever happens, does so due to the wish of Shriji Maharaj." However, the devotees had become aggravated.

Motibhai carried Jay Shankar out of the building. Seeing the child, the sadhus allowed Motibhai to leave. Once outside, Motibhai hurried to wake up Ghanshyambhai Vaidya. Ghanshyambhai at once arrived at the scene with the police. The doors of the mandir campus were locked. The chief of police called out, "Open the mandir doors or I will break them and come inside."

Frightened, the sadhus opened the doors. They then frantically searched for a place to hide. Seeing bricks and shattered glass everywhere, the police chief documented the case. He bowed before Swamishri and humbly requested, "Please give us the names of the sadhus who are responsible so that I can detain them."

"We do not wish to complain against anyone. We do not bear hatred towards anyone, so please do not take any steps against them," replied Swamishri.

The chief of police was moved by Swamishri's saintliness. He bowed before Swamishri. Motibhai escorted Swamishri to his own living quarters. From there, Swamishri left for Sarangpur.

The sadhus of Vartal were again thwarted. Not only had they been unable to harm Swamishri, but they had come away ruining their own names. Their hatred for Swamishri only grew. They thought to themselves, "Yagnapurushdasji has slipped away. What shall we do now?"

News of Swamishri's escape reached Vartal and Gadhada. Those who opposed Swamishri were disheartened. However, they regrouped and began planning their next plot to harass Swamishri.

In Gadhada, the sadhus already despised Swamishri because they had lost control of

the Sarangpur mandir to him. They began spreading lies, “Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has embezzled six thousand rupees from the mandir stores in Sarangpur. He has sent the money to Zaverbhai, the Diwan of Limbdi. The sadhus in Vadhwan are now using these very funds to build a mandir!”

Swamishri was a true renunciant of women and wealth. He did not fear such accusations. Swamishri’s disciples, however, were furious, “Day or night, Swamishri never tires of giving spiritual discourses. He works only to spread the glory of Maharaj and Swami. He bears no hatred for anyone. He observes eight-fold celibacy. He is a true renunciant of wealth. How can anyone harbour such hatred for such a great sadhu? How can they harass him so? How can we tolerate such persecution?”

The attack in Vadodara alarmed the devotees of Gujarat. They wrote a letter to Gordhanbhai Kothari, “The sadhus are growing more and more hostile towards Shastri Yagnapurushdasji. Therefore, if you make any decisions concerning him without consulting us, the consequences will not be good.”

So many prominent devotees supported Swamishri so faithfully. Gordhanbhai was taken aback.

24. Invincible Power

Gordhanbhai called Swamishri to Vartal and told him to build a mandir in Virsad. Because Swamishri had come to Vartal, his devotees also followed. Soon, an assembly of thousands convened before Swamishri. Swamishri spoke about the greatness of Akshar-Purushottam. He emphasized the importance of serving the cause. He informed them that the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam were soon to be consecrated in Vadhwan. He encouraged them to donate for the cause.

Within moments, two and a half thousand rupees were pledged for the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis*. Other sadhus and even Gordhanbhai Kothari were unaware of what was taking place. They thought that Swamishri was gathering funds for a new mandir in Virsad.

Swamishri then reached Ahmedabad to meet Nirmaldas. He told him, “We will fund our *murtis*. When you go to Jaipur to have the other *murtis* made, one of our men will accompany you. Our *murtis* should be made according to our designs.” After he reached a precise agreement, Swamishri sent Purushottamdas, a mason devotee of Gondal, to Jaipur.

Nirmaldas went to Vadodara to have the remaining *murtis* made. Swamishri asked Kothari Jetha Bhagat, of the Vadodara Swaminarayan mandir, to make any necessary arrangements for Nirmaldas. At Swamishri’s behest, Jetha Bhagat boldly helped Nirmaldas.

Swamishri then arrived in Bharuch. He conducted a one-day *parayan* on the Vachanamrut. A thousand devotees from all over Gujarat came to listen. Swamishri spoke extensively about the concept of the Sadhu as the gateway to liberation.

News of Swamishri's discourses reached Vartal. Those who disliked Swamishri were further enraged.

"Thousands run after Yagnapurushdasji. They sponsor his meals and serve him, whereas not even five devotees gather before us. How can we permit this? Even more, Yagnapurushdasji speaks so openly about Akshar-Purushottam. He sides with Nirmaldas. He requests Jetha Bhagat to make arrangements for Nirmaldas in Vadodara. Even Gordhanbhai Kothari supports Yagnapurushdasji. If this continues, Yagnapurushdasji will control not just Vartal, but the entire Sampraday. He will become its leader. Then, no one will value us."

They started plotting to put a stop to Yagnapurushdasji. Swamishri fearlessly continued his efforts.

Gordhanbhai called Swamishri in Vartal. He warned, "The sadhus here are preparing to do away with you. They cannot tolerate your prominence. Wherever you go, there are great celebrations. Thousands are drawn to you. The sadhus cannot bear to see this. Therefore, it is better that you limit your activities."

Swamishri courteously replied, "We gather only for discourses and to worship and remember God. If people are drawn to me, if they see greatness, that is the work of Shriji Maharaj. I do not do anything against the traditions of Satsang. If you wish to see for yourself, we will now only hold discourses in Vartal."

Swamishri's reply pleased Gordhanbhai. He was extremely fond of Swamishri. Furthermore, Gordhanbhai saw the improved condition of the mandir, guesthouse, and *haveli* in Sarangpur. He was impressed by Swamishri's abilities. However, he reasoned that if he appeased the sadhus, they would harass Swamishri less. Thus, he relieved Swamishri of his duties in Sarangpur and called him back to Vartal.

25. The Murti-Pratishtha of Akshar-Purushottam in Vadhwan

From Vartal, Swamishri went to the village of Vaso. The construction work in Vadhwan was now complete. Swamishri gathered all of the devotees who had faith in Akshar-Purushottam. He told them to go to the *murti-pratishtha* in Vadhwan. Kunjvihariprasad and the Vadhwan sadhus had promised Swamishri that they would consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central sanctum of the mandir. Even so, Swamishri instructed the devotees, "If there is opposition, then have our *murtis* consecrated in the first sanctum of the mandir. Please inform us by telegram."

The Ahmedabad sadhus had openly disputed the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* being consecrated in Vadhwan. Thus, the devotees in Vadhwan pressured Kunjvihariprasad. They advised him not to consecrate the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* at all. However, Swamishri's devotees intervened. They reminded Kunjvihariprasad of his promise to Swamishri. Swamishri had fearlessly sided with them. From the very beginning, he had been of tremendous help. Finally, both sides reached a compromise and agreed to

consecrate the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* in the first sanctum. The *murti-pratishtha* was performed accordingly. For the first time, the *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam found its home in the sanctum of a mandir.

Swamishri's devotees were so overjoyed that they forgot to send him a telegram. Finally remembering, they wired the message to Vaso. Unfortunately, Swamishri had left Vaso to go to Vartal before the message arrived. Bhailalbhai of Vaso reached Vartal late at night. He specially had the gates opened so that he could deliver the message to Swamishri. Overjoyed, Swamishri at once showed the message to Gordhanbhai Kothari and informed him of the *murti-pratishtha* in Vadhwan.

Throughout his life, Gordhanbhai had worked to suppress the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He had used all of his powers to prevent it from spreading, especially into the sanctum of a mandir. He sat quietly, defeated and demoralized. Finally, he spoke, "Whatever Shriji does, is meant to be."

"This work has been done by none other than Shriji," added Swamishri.

Angered with Swamishri's blunt remark, Gordhanbhai ordered him to leave the room. Moments later, Gordhanbhai composed himself. He called Swamishri back and asked for a detailed account of all that had happened. Swamishri narrated how he had helped the Vadhwan cause. Gordhanbhai was truly impressed with Swamishri's management skills. He felt assured that because of Swamishri, the future of the Sampraday was bright.

The sadhus in Vartal were now furious. They thought to themselves, "Even the Kothari does not scold Yagnapurushdas. While merely sitting in Vartal, Yagnapurushdas has managed to have *murtis* consecrated in Vadhwan. In the future who knows what he will do? He may even sway the entire Satsang community in his favour. We will be at his mercy. No one will bother to consult us."

The sadhus discussed amongst themselves, plotting to defeat and drive away Swamishri once and for all.

Swamishri, however, was unperturbed. He fearlessly visited each nearby village, carrying the message of Akshar-Purushottam. When he arrived in Bochasan, he acquired the *murtis* of Ram and Lakshman from the Ramji mandir. These *murtis* had been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj himself. In the old mandir, he consecrated these *murtis* on a platform which had also been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj.

Swamishi remarked, "One day, there will be a great *shikarbaddh* mandir in Bochasan. When Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj is consecrated in the central sanctum, we will also consecrate these *murtis* there."

Hearing Swamishri's prediction, the devotees asked, "When will this mandir be built?"

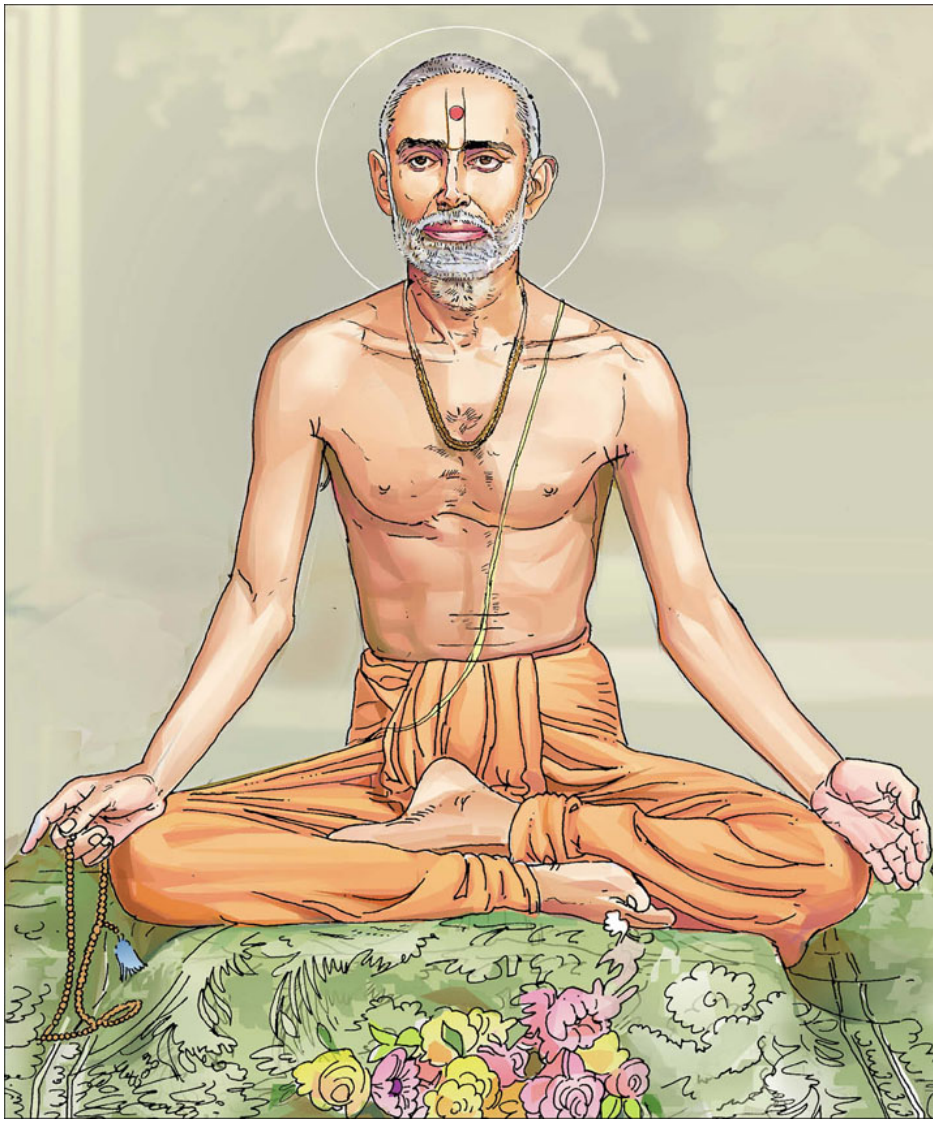
Swamishri replied, "It will happen in two or three years and you all will see it occur."

Everyone acknowledged that nothing short of a miracle would be needed for Swamishri's words to hold true. When there was such harassment from the sadhus in Vartal, how could one speak of a new mandir?

Swamishri then reached Virsad. From there, he went to Chansad for medical

treatment. He gave several spiritual discourses in Chansad.

26. The Hail of Akshar-Purushottam Jai in Vartal



Shastri Yagnapurushdasji

The Chaitra Punam festival would soon be celebrated in Vartal. Swamishri was ill and would be unable to attend the celebrations. It seemed likely that the wrath of the sadhus would lead to some dreadful turn of events.

Swamishri predicted, “An assembly opposing our cause has been planned in Vartal. However, they will quarrel among themselves. Nothing will happen to us.”

With Swamishri's consent, Kalidasbhai of Chansad and several other devotees set out for Vartal.

After they left, Swamishri sent for Galbhai and asked, "Do you have the courage to hail the *jai* of Akshar-Purushottam at the assembly in Vartal?"

No ordinary man would dare to attempt such a deed against such hostile opposition. Galbhai, however, was far from ordinary. He replied valiantly, "If it is your wish and your command, then I indeed have such courage!"

"Then call out the *jai* of Akshar-Purushottam in the Punam assembly."

Eager to exclaim the *jai*, Galbhai hurried to Vartal.

As soon as Acharya Maharaj arrived in the Punam assembly, Galbhai roared, "Sahajanand Swami Maharaj *ni* Jai!" Everyone repeated the call.

Immediately Galbhai followed, "Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj *ni* Jai!" Again, everyone repeated. Immediately, all realized their mistake. But what could they do now? Embarrassed by their own blunder, they scowled at Galbhai. Overawed by his deep voice, huge eyes, and massive figure, no one dared to say a word. They were furious within.

The assembly dispersed before anyone could speak. The sadhus again huddled in groups at their respective *asans*. Again, a burning question came up, "If Shastri's disciples could dare to carry out such a deed, they are capable of anything. Indeed, Shastri will have to be removed from Vartal before he ruins the entire Satsang community."

Even after having been humiliated in the morning, many sadhus again gathered in the afternoon. Bhimjibhai Kothari of Gadhada started to hurl false accusations, "Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has embezzled a chest full of rupees from Sarangpur. He has sent the money to Vadhwan to support their mandir. Why doesn't anyone scold him?"

Kalidas immediately stood up and refuted, "You are speaking of the same sadhu who has boosted the Sarangpur mandir's annual income from 2-3,000 to 22,000. He has enhanced the beauty of Sarangpur by building a guesthouse, a bungalow, and silver gates for the mandir. Are you not ashamed of hurling such baseless accusations against him? You are slandering a sadhu possessing so many saintly virtues. Gordhanbhai Kothari is aware that Shastri is innocent, yet he just sits and listens. Why does he not speak in Shastri's defense?"

Gordhanbhai at once spoke. "This is all a scheme planned by Bhimji and the sadhus. Shastri is innocent." Gordhanbhai immediately stood up and left the gathering. Chaos ensued as the sadhus began quarrelling amongst one another. Swamishri's words proved true and no trouble arose from the meeting.

27. A Whirlwind of Opposition

Swamishri now held his next series of Vachanamrut discourses in Vartal. Devotees arrived from all over Gujarat to listen. Even Gordhanbhai and many sadhus of Vartal

would sit and listen as Swamishri gave discourses.

No one was happy to see Gordhanbhai support Swamishri so openly. One day, Kothari Khushal Bhagat addressed Gordhanbhai rudely, “You too are a Bandia? Why have you joined Yagnapurushdasji?”

Gordhanbhai immediately replied, “Of the two thousand sadhus of Vartal, I have yet to see one who has completely renounced women and wealth like Shastri Yagnapurushdasji. I find his words to be as sweet as sugar crystals. Therefore, I come here to listen to him.” Hearing Gordhanbhai’s words, Khushal Bhagat walked away.

Swamishri had deliberately kept his own *asan* near to that of Gordhanbhai. Also, Swamishri was always surrounded by prominent devotees. No one would scold them as they regularly sponsored meals and donated generously to the mandir. Thus, he was well protected. Like smoking logs, the sadhus angrily watched on, unable to do him any harm.

Acharya Lakshmiprasadji was young and flamboyant. Complying with Gordhanbhai’s request, Swamishri advised Lakshmiprasadji to behave properly. Lakshmiprasadji did not like being preached to. He began to dislike Swamishri. As a result, when other sadhus harassed or disrespected Swamishri, Lakshmiprasadji refrained from disciplining them.

Over time, the sadhus found ways to disturb Swamishri’s discourses. Several sadhus would burn chilli powder near Swamishri’s assemblies. The unbearable fumes would choke devotees and make them get up from Swamishri’s discourses.

Once, Nandkishoredas, a sadhu who disliked Swamishri, told his disciple to go fill up his large clay pot with drinking water. Then he instructed, “On your way back, when you pass by where everyone is sitting, fall over with the pot.” The disciple did as he was told. The pot broke into pieces. The devotees were drenched with water. Again, Swamishri’s assembly dispersed. Even then, Swamishri and the devotees remained undaunted.

28. Adverse Times

There was fierce opposition against Swamishri. Those who opposed Swamishri did not want him living in Vartal. Every time they saw him, a fiery anger burned within them. Because of such a hostile environment, it did not make sense to let Swamishri stay any longer. The devotees met and decided that if trouble arose, they should take Swamishri away from Vartal. Staying there was no longer in Swamishri’s best interests. Everyone was sure that the wrathful sadhus would attempt something dreadful.

Thus, all of Swamishri’s devotees gathered in Vartal on 12 November 1905 (Kartik Punam, Samvat 1962). They did not leave Swamishri alone for even a second. As a result, those who had plotted to harm him were unable to carry out their plans. They were angered even more.

The devotees pleaded to Swamishri, “Please do not go to the kitchen to eat.”

“A sadhu must only eat in the common dining area. He cannot eat separately at his own *asan*.” Swamishri did not heed the devotees’ request.

Today, Swamishri was breaking his Ekadashi fast of the day before. He went into the kitchen to have some *khichdi*. The devotees anxiously waited outside.

As Swamishri was served *khichdi*, he smelled the pungent odour of a deadly poison coming from his food. He immediately understood the situation. Even then, how could he disrespect food that was offered to and sanctified by God? He ate a little and then got up to leave the kitchen. As he was walking out, he stumbled, feeling dizzy. Two devotees grabbed his arms and brought him safely back to his *asan*. His throat began to burn. The devotees brought ghee for him. After drinking a little, Swamishri assured them, “Nothing will happen to me. Do not worry.”

The sadhus bitterly grumbled to themselves, “Nothing even happened to Yagnapurushdasji. He even digested the poison. Now we will have to devise another plan. This time, he should not escape.”

The wicked sadhus came up with yet another plan, “When Shastri Yagnapurushdasji comes to eat, we will push him into the cooking fire. He will burn to ashes. Finally, we will rid ourselves of this obstacle.”

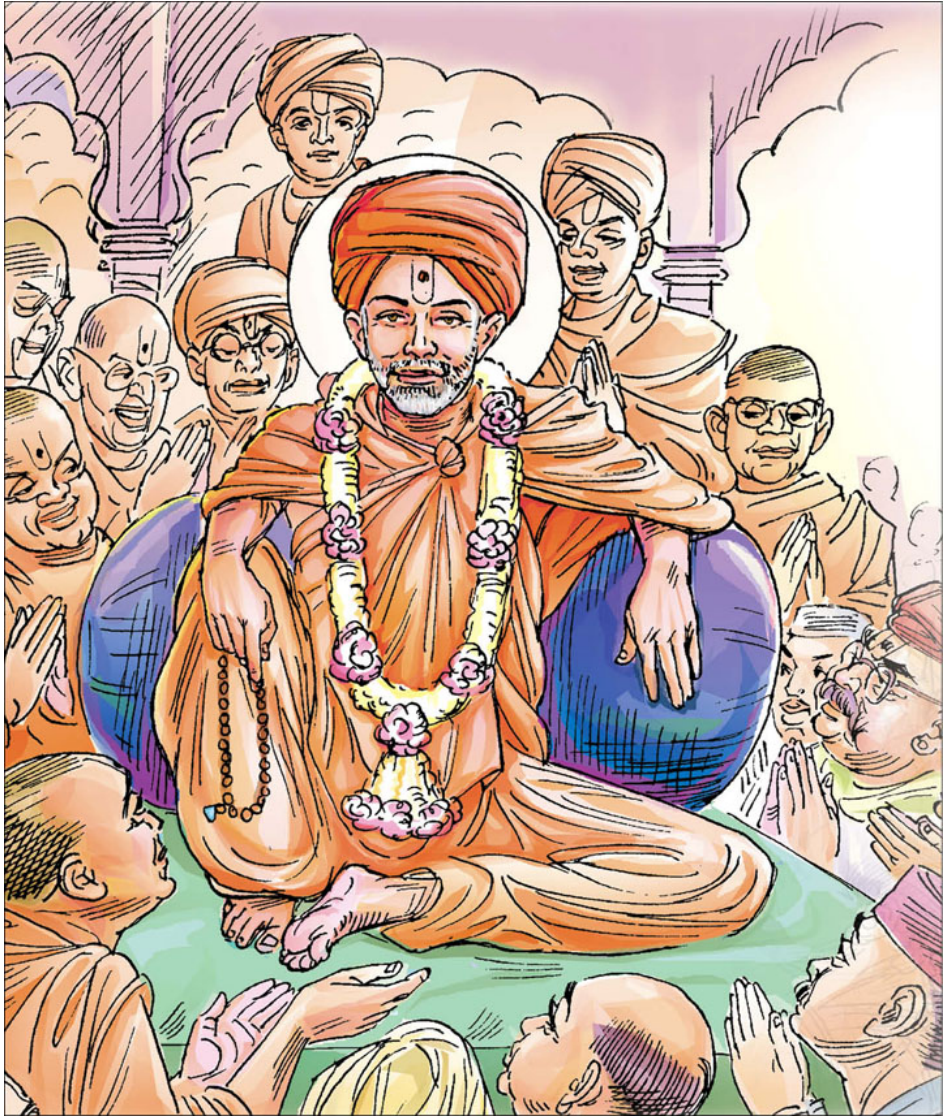
When the Kauravs had treacherously plotted to burn the Pandavs to death in the wax mansion, God protected them. Similarly, these efforts to kill Swamishri proved futile.

Swamishri continued to eat in the kitchen. The following day, he entered the kitchen for lunch. Fifteen or so brave devotees accompanied him. They waited at the door. Nothing could be done to Swamishri in their presence.

The sadhus shouted to them, “Leave this area at once.”

“We will not move even an inch until Shastri Yagnapurushdasji finishes eating and comes out,” replied the devotees. The sadhus began to push the devotees away. The resulting commotion served as a perfect distraction. Five devotees sneaked in and carried Swamishri out of the kitchen. No one knew what happened. The scuffle continued. Finally, everyone realized that Yagnapurushdasji had already slipped out and that they were now struggling for no reason.

29. Not Different from This Mandir and Satsang



Devotees urge Swamishri to leave Vartal

Swamishri's devotees were now alarmed. They gathered to decide what to do. Everyone agreed that the mandir in Rundel needed to be finished. They decided to ask for Swamishri and his group of sadhus to come and help with the construction. Everyone approached Gordhanbhai. Gordhanbhai directed them to Acharya Lakshmiprasadji. Acharya Maharaj sent them back to Gordhanbhai. They went back and forth four times, but neither gave them a straight answer.

Finally, Gordhanbhai advised, "You all should pressure Acharya Maharaj and request him. But whatever you do, I advise that you do not leave Shastri alone here."

Everyone's fears were now confirmed. They were convinced that it was unwise to keep Swamishri in Vartal. They explained the harsh reality to Swamishri. Swamishri, however, did not waver. He refused to leave Vartal. He said, "If this body perishes, so

be it, but do not speak of leaving Vartal. Bhagatji Maharaj told me, 'Even if they cut you into pieces, I will stitch you together, but you must never leave the doors of Vartal.'"

Swamishri's words perplexed the devotees. Fortunately, Krishnaji Ada arrived in Vartal on the morning of Punam. The devotees informed him of all that had taken place. Krishnaji Ada spoke with Swamishri in private. Again, Swamishri emphasized what Bhagatji Maharaj had said.

Krishnaji Ada explained, "What you say is true. However, Shriji Maharaj has commanded in the Shikshapatri that one should act according to the circumstances at hand. Therefore, you must not stay here any longer."

Swamishri pondered over his words. He thought to himself, "Krishnaji Ada was blessed by Gunatitanand Swami. He is a great *mukta* from Akshardham. If he advises me to leave, Shriji Maharaj himself must also wish that I depart."

Swamishri bowed and replied, "After listening to you, I believe that Bhagatji Maharaj has spoken through you. I will therefore act according to your wishes."

Pleased by Swamishri's reply, Krishnaji Ada blessed him. The devotees, meanwhile, breathed a sigh of relief.

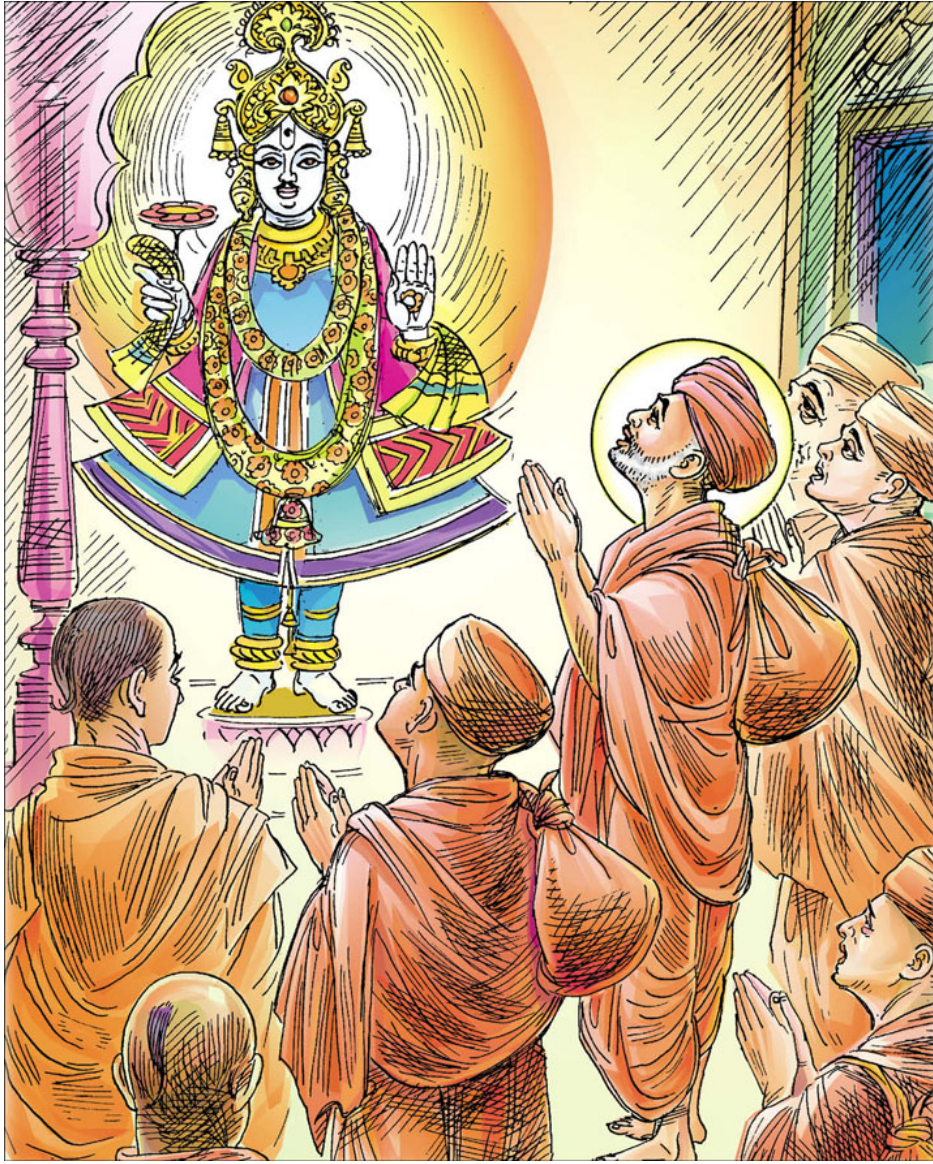
After the celebrations, the devotees approached Lakshmiprasadji and requested that Swamishri and his sadhus be sent to Bochasan. They asked for a permission note. But, Lakshmiprasadji lost his temper, "Who would bother to give him a permission note? The entire country is open for him. He may go where ever he pleases."

The devotees were hurt by Lakshmiprasadji's insolence. There was no room for doubt. Swamishri must indeed leave Vartal. They came to Swamishri's seat and related all that had occurred.

For a while, Swamishri sat in deep thought. Finally, he announced, "We do not want to separate from this mandir, nor from this Satsang. However, perhaps because Maharaj so wishes, we will have to."

Swamishri then told Purushottamdas Swami to stay behind, "If they do give us a permission note to travel to Bochasan, then bring the note. But, if they do not change their minds, then leave to join us."

30. Without Any Enemies



Swamishri prays to Harikrishna Maharaj before leaving Vartal

Swamishri was aware that such circumstances had come about due to Shriji Maharaj's wish. It was Swamishri's efforts to spread the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam which had led to trouble. Thus, he felt no remorse for what had happened. He only regretted that he could not openly discuss true *upasana* in such a sacred place as Vartal.

In the mandir, Swamishri and five other sadhus stood before the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj.

Swamishri prayed, "Oh Maharaj! We do not wish to leave. However, if it is your will that we separate, then always assist us and forever stay with us."

Swamishri, accompanied by five sadhus and about one hundred and fifty devotees, walked out of the Hanuman gate. As Swamishri left, Vartal seemed barren, diminished in splendour.

Swamishri walked along the road bordering the Gomti Lake. On the way, he met Kishorebhai, a police officer. When he had learned that Swamishri was leaving, Kishorebhai had hurried towards the mandir in hope of meeting Swamishri.

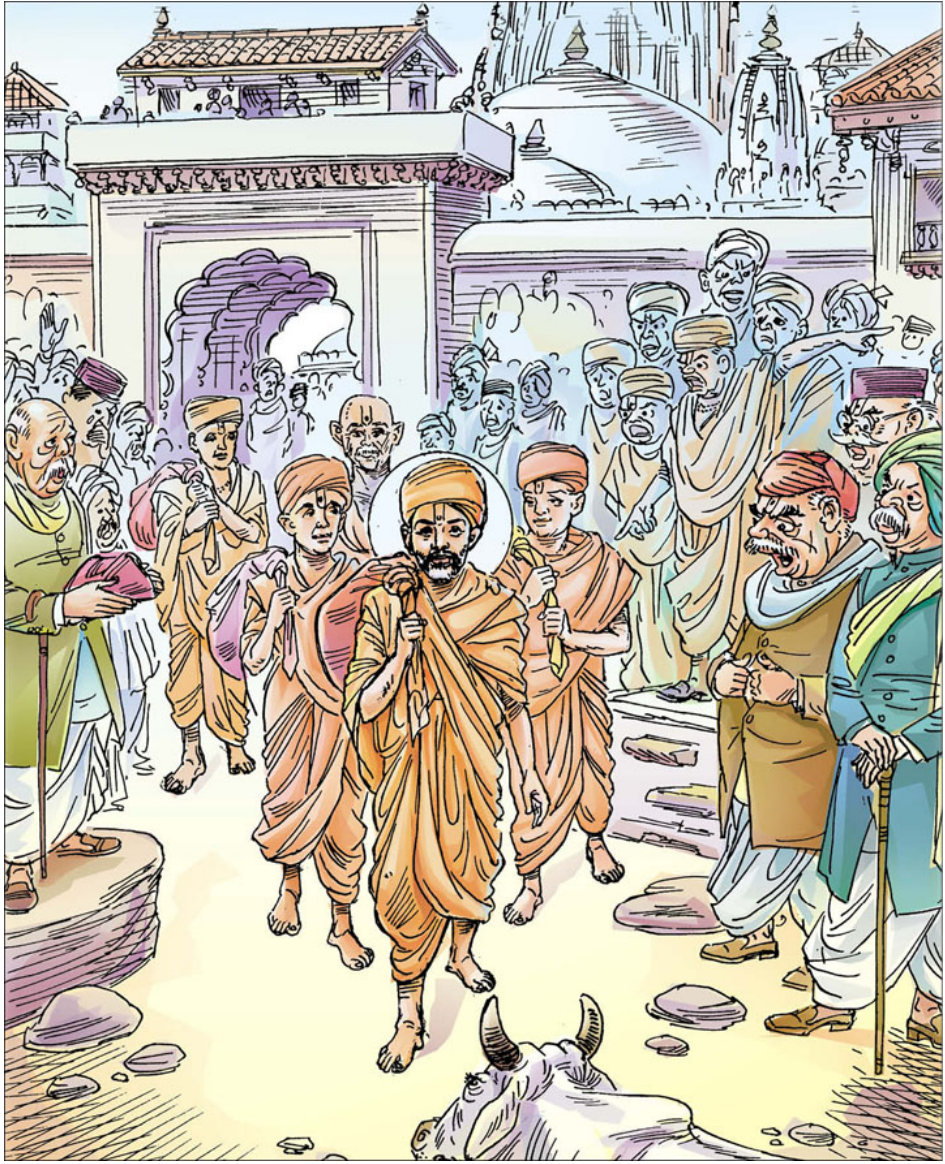
Kishorebhai bowed and pleaded, “Swami, give me the names of those who have troubled you. I will send them to the jail in Nadiad.”

“We do not wish to do any such thing. A sadhu must always tolerate insults and spread Satsang.”

Kishorebhai was moved by Swamishri’s saintliness. Before he left, he sent for a bullock cart and requested Swamishri to travel in it. Seeing his affection, Swamishri agreed to do so.

News of Swamishri’s departure spread throughout Vartal. Groups of devotees came running with garlands in their hands. They garlanded Swamishri. Soon, a heap of garlands accumulated.

As Swamishri started walking, he saw a cow coming towards them.



Shashtriji Maharaj leaves Vartal

"This is an auspicious sign," he remarked. As he took their leave, Swamishri addressed those who had gathered, "Please donate and sponsor meals for Thakorji in Vartal as you always have. Those of you, who regularly attend the Punam festival here, please continue to do so. This mandir and Thakorji are ours. We are not separating from them."

Swamishri arrived in the village of Karamsad. From there, he arrived in Bochasan.

Although Swamishri only had four sadhus with him, they were valiant and ready to give their lives for him. They did not care for physical comforts. They were undeterred by insult or honour. They endured much persecution for Swamishri. Some had

tolerated smoldering ashes thrown upon their heads. Others had been pierced from behind by huge needles. However, none had ever complained. None had admitted defeat. They never retaliated, but simply tolerated. With the loving support of such remarkable sadhus, Swamishri's mission gained speed.

31. A Mandir for True Upasana

Swamishri and his devotees decided to celebrate the Fagan Punam festival of Samvat 1962 (10 March 1906) in the city of Anand. The opposition against Swamishri had not yet subsided. Many opponents worked to prevent the gathering in Anand from taking place. They tried to discourage devotees from attending. However, their efforts went in vain, as eight hundred devotees attended the celebrations. The devotees requested that a new mandir be built.

Swamishri replied, "Perhaps we may be able to reach a compromise with Vartal. So, let us not build a mandir yet."

The devotees, however, insisted on building a separate mandir. They began noting pledges for funds. Within an hour, forty thousand rupees had been pledged.

Swamishri announced, "Please stop the pledges for now. Later, if the funds are insufficient, we will ask for more."

The funds had been raised, but one question still remained: Where would they build the mandir? All invited Swamishri to build the mandir in their own villages. Swamishri, however, chose Bochasan, explaining, "Shriji Maharaj promised Kashidas Mota that a mandir would be built in Bochasan. Therefore, according to Maharaj's wish, we should build it there."

Everyone agreed and soon the land for Bochasan mandir was acquired.

At this time, Jagatguru Shankaracharya Madhavtirth had also come to Anand. Madhavtirth thought to himself, "If a great scholar like Swamishri were to join me, we could easily defeat the scholars of Vartal in debate." Madhavtirth was eager to meet Swamishri. Swamishri, however, understood his intentions and sent him a message, "We are one with Vartal."

Although Madhavtirth did not achieve his objectives, he could not help but respect Swamishri. Despite such persecution, Swamishri still bore such affection for Vartal.

Madhavtirth exclaimed, "In the entire Sampraday, there is no equal to Shastri Yagnapurushdasji in scholarship and saintliness."

32. From a Trinket into a Diamond

Hirabhai Mukhi, a descendant of Kashidas Mota, lived in Bochasan. He struck terror not only in the village, but throughout the Gujarat region. He would not shy away from sin. He often stole, plundered, and even murdered at will. Whoever dared to file a

complaint or stand as an eyewitness against him was as good as dead. All of Gujarat shuddered at the mention of his name. Not even the police dared lay a hand on him.

Once, Hirabhai decided to sponsor a meal for Swamishri and his followers at the mandir. Swamishri accepted his charity and served all of the sadhus, but he himself refused to eat. Hirabhai was informed. He came to meet Swamishri.

Swamishri boldly set his terms, "I will eat only if you accept *vartman* and become a *satsangi*."

As Hirabhai looked into Swamishri's eyes, his life changed. He gave up his sinful ways, accepted *vartman* from Swamishri, and became a devotee. News of Hirabhai's transformation travelled quickly. All who lived in the region of Gujarat were amazed at Swamishri's feat. People appreciated that one who could transform a brute like Hirabhai into a devotee of God must indeed be some great incarnation.

Gordhanbhai Kothari heard about Hirabhai's transformation. He called him to Vartal and exclaimed, "Hirabhai! Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has made you into a devotee. If Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj were still alive today, he would honour Yagnapurushdasji with two pairs of Shriji Maharaj's *charanarvind* and would give him an eminent position in Satsang. Unfortunately, those who are in power today are eager to exile him."

Hearing Gordhanbhai's words, Hirabhai realized Swamishri's greatness.

33. The Protective Shield of Gunatit

Arjanbhai of Mota Gokharvara has darshan of Gunatitanand Swami

Those who opposed Swamishri burned with envy when they heard of Hirabhai's transformation. Three armed *parshads* set out on a camel to kill Swamishri. Swamishri had already left Bochasan early in the morning, so there was no reason to worry. Still, Hirabhai decided to teach the *parshads* a lesson. He detained them. As he swung his stick at the *parshads*, he accidently struck the camel. Startled by the blow, the camel started to run. Terrified, the *parshads* fled with their camel.

Because they had missed their chance to assault Swamishri, the *parshads* again set out after six or seven days. This time, they were more heavily armed.

Swamishri was in the village of Sadhi. Only two miles away, Lakshmiprasadji was a guest in the village of Ranu. Learning of Swamishri's location, the *parshads* left Ranu and headed for Sadhi.

That morning, Swamishri suddenly told Ashabhai, “Bring me an oxen cart immediately. I want to leave for Padra.”

Ashabhai insisted, “Swami, I would prefer that you eat lunch and then leave.”

“The other sadhus will stay for lunch. I will go to Padra and then eat,” replied Swamishri. As he and another sadhu left Sadhi, they headed for Sejakuva instead of Padra.

Meanwhile, the *parshads* arrived in Sadhi. They tied down their camel on the outskirts of the village and entered. Mahijibhai, an elder, found out that they had come to attack Swamishri. He angrily cursed and scolded them. In the meantime, one of the villagers ran to the outskirts and untied the camel, setting it free. Even then, the *parshads* had learned from the Kothari of the mandir that Swamishri had left for Padra. Retrieving their camel, the *parshads* immediately started for Padra.

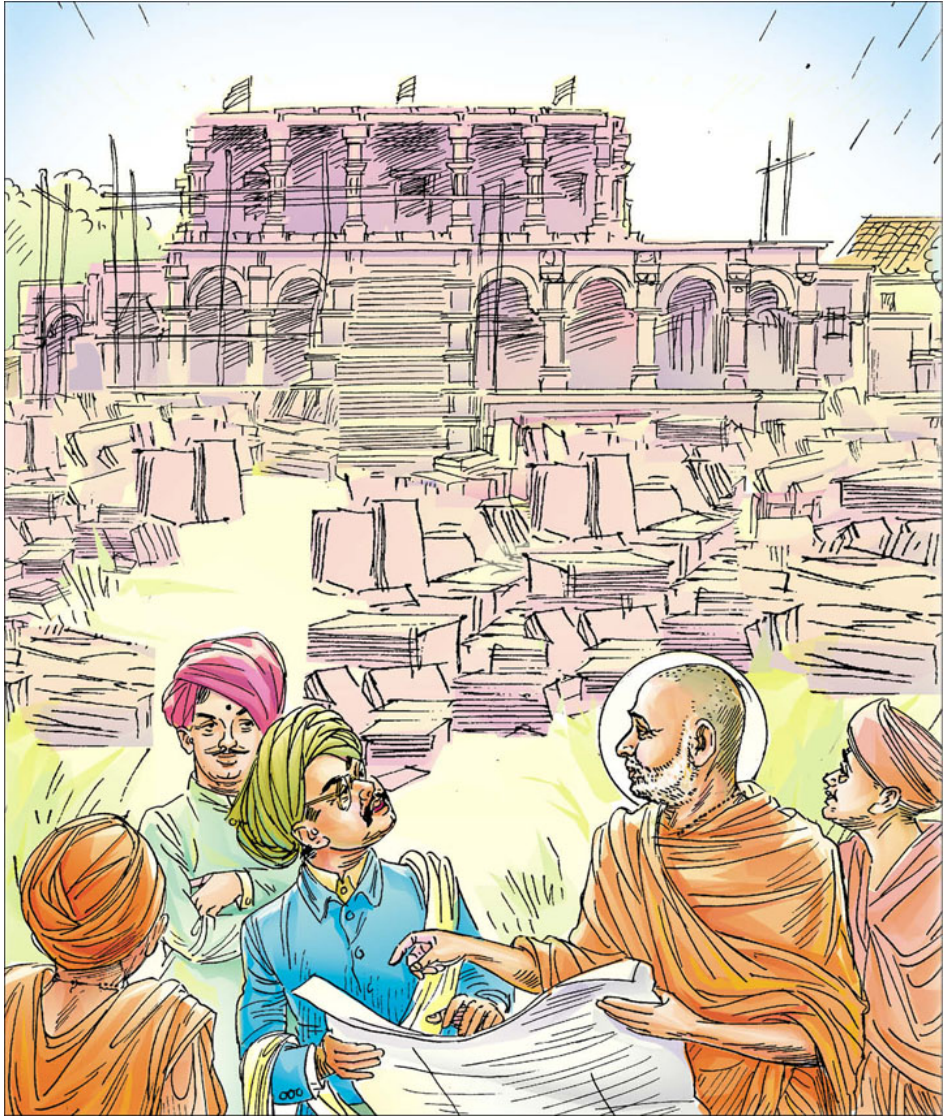
The devotees began to worry, “What will happen when they reach Padra? They will attack Swamishri.” Little did the devotees know that Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami were protecting Swamishri all along. Also, Swamishri had now left Sejakuva and passing through Bhaili, reached the village of Dabhasa.

That very day, something remarkable happened in Mota Gokharvara, a village in Kathiawad. There, a devotee by the name of Arjanbhai had a vision of Gunatitanand Swami standing in front of his house. Swami was wearing a knotted dhoti. Arjanbhai immediately offered *dandvat pranams* and requested Swami to grace his home.

Swami replied, “I cannot come right now. My devotee is in trouble in Gujarat, so I am going to protect him.” Swami then disappeared before Arjanbhai’s eyes.

Just then, the *parshads* arrived in Padra. They were disappointed to find that Swamishri was nowhere to be found. Overcome by hunger and thirst, they returned to Sadhi. When they arrived at the outskirts of the village, they found a herd of wild buffaloes rushing towards them. Seeing the camel, the startled buffaloes ran wildly in every direction. A few buffaloes collided with the camel, knocking off and heavily injuring the *parshads*. Finally, someone rented a bullock cart, and sent the *parshads* back to Renu. Indeed, Maharaj and Swami were watching over Swamishri.

34. The First Akshar-Purushottam Mandir in Bochasan



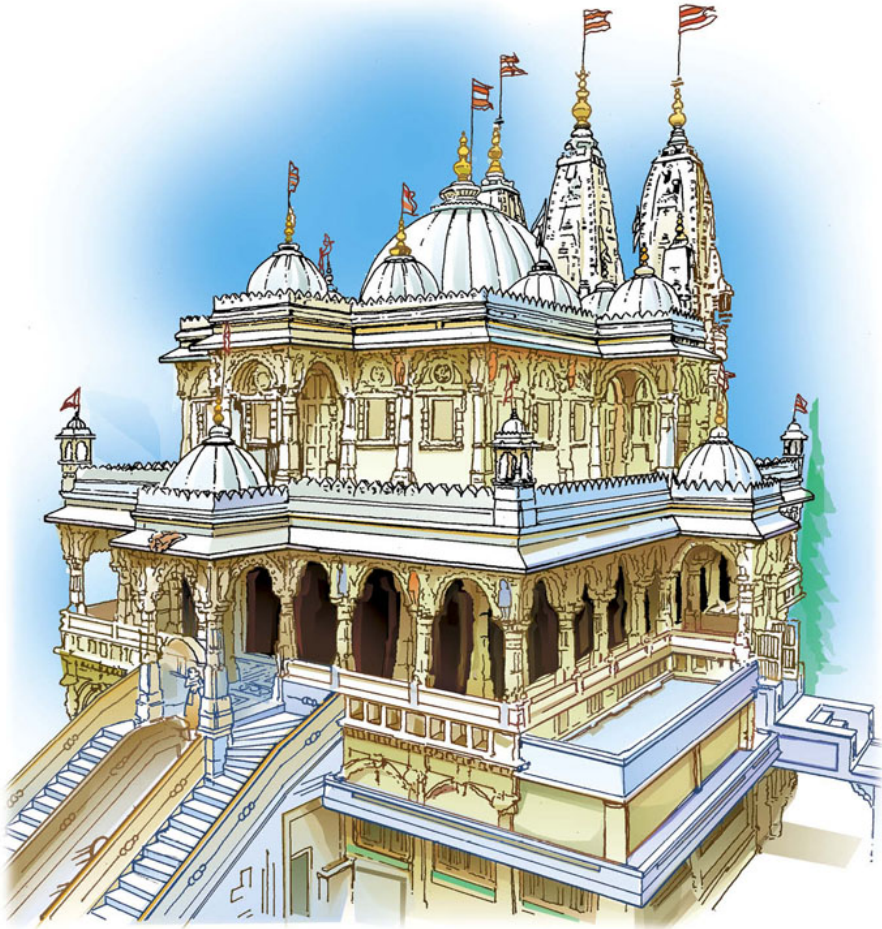
Shastriji Maharaj at the construction site of Bochasan mandir

Despite harassment from the opposition, the groundbreaking ceremony for the mandir was carried out without any trouble. Now, they started to dig the foundation. Swamishri himself joined in this *seva*. The sadhus and devotees also worked with enthusiasm. Many devotees lent their oxen and carts for the mandir cause. They sacrificed their farm work, thereby putting aside their livelihood for up to six months.

Once, while digging the foundation, some devotees found a pot of gold treasure. They told Swamishri about it. Swamishri, not at all allured by wealth, at once exclaimed, "In this mandir, we will consecrate the *murti* of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. She will bring wealth from all over the universe. So, let this wealth remain buried."

Swamishri then had the treasure buried in the foundation. He was determined to

rely only on God and the *seva* of God's devotees to build the mandir.



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bochasan

Those who opposed Swamishri tried to win over Hirabhai with money. They offered him five thousand rupees to oppose the mandir's construction. Hirabhai, however, had already been won over by Swamishri.

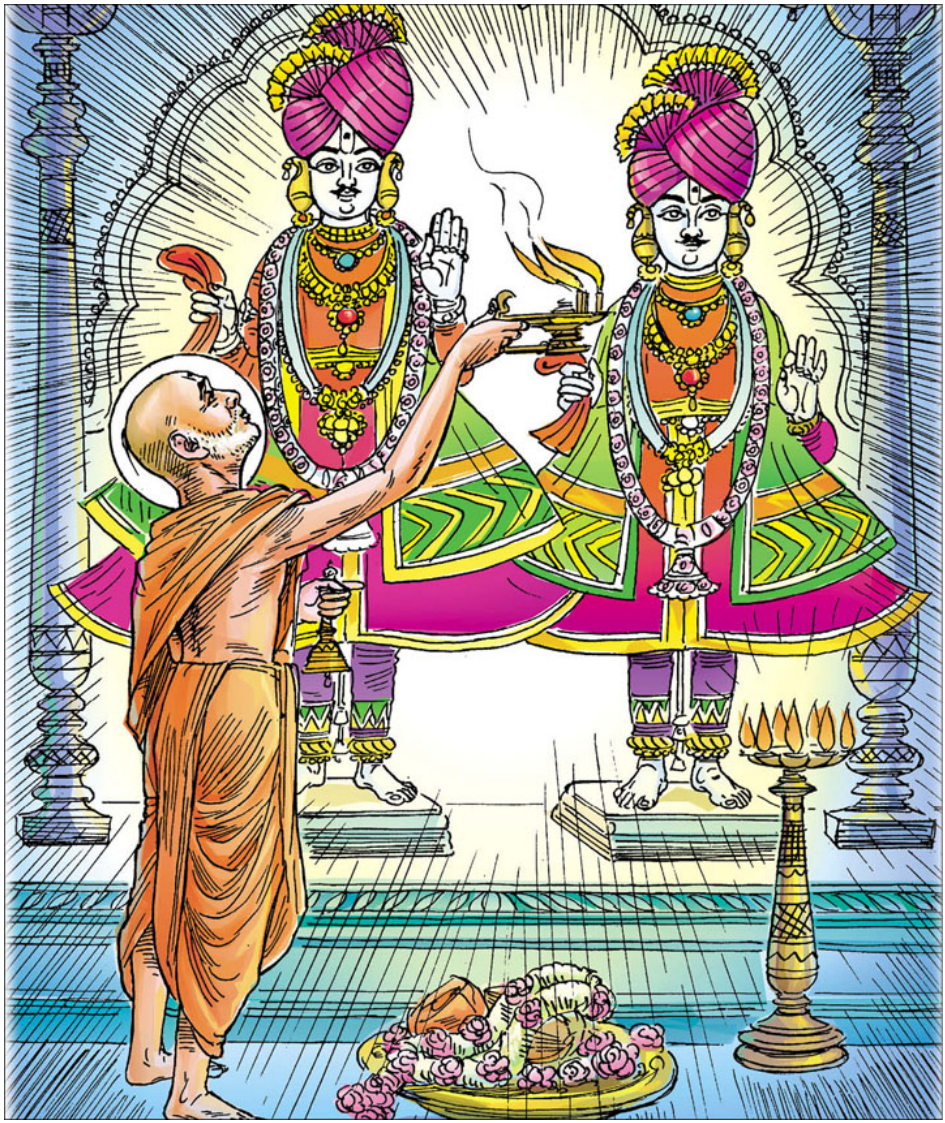
He bluntly refused, "I am honoured that a mandir is being built in my village. Swamishri has already given me wealth in the form of a new life. He has uplifted me, making me a human. He is my guru. I will use this money for whatever purpose he instructs. If you agree, then give me the money. But, I will not betray my guru by accepting a bribe to oppose him."

Leaving everyone speechless, Hirabhai continued, "If anyone opposes the mandir's construction, I will surely take revenge. If you are brave enough, only then come forth."

Hearing Hirabhai's threats, Swamishri's opponents lost whatever courage they had left.

The day of the *murti-pratishtha*, 5 June 1907 (Vaishakh *vad* 10, Samvat 1963),

quickly approached. All were unable to contain their enthusiasm. For the first time a Param Ekantik Sadhu like Swamishri would consecrate Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the sanctum of a mandir. The preparations for the festival were proceeding in full force.



The murtis of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Bochasan Mandir

As a precautionary measure, Hirabhai stationed two thousand of his men to guard the site. They stood on all four sides to deter anyone who dared to disrupt the construction.

After the *yagna* had finished, the sadhus and devotees lifted Shriji Maharaj's *murti* and placed it in the central sanctum for the *murti-pratishtha*. Next, they tried to lift Gunatitanand Swami's *murti*. Surprisingly, even though it weighed less, Swami's *murti* did not budge. Everyone wondered to themselves, "Is Swami testing us?"

Exhausted, they all came to Swamishri and related what had happened. Swamishri immediately came to Gunatitanand Swami's *murti* and prayed, "Oh Swami! It is for you that we left Vartal. It is for you that we tolerate insult and persecution. Please have mercy upon us. Please reside in this mandir."

Swamishri then pushed a spike underneath the *murti* and, immediately the *murti* was lifted up and easily carried to the mandir. It was placed in the central sanctum next to Shriji Maharaj. Swamishri then performed the *murti-pratishtha*. The victory call of Akshar-Purushottam resounded everywhere.

The promise that Shriji Maharaj had made to Kashidas Mota had now been fulfilled by Swamishri. The true *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam was finally established in the central sanctum of a mandir.

35. A Nail on the Head of Sheshnag

Swamishri now needed some land to build an entrance gate for the mandir. However, because the village road passed through that strip of land, the people of the village refused to cooperate. Still, Swamishri wanted the land. The villagers sent the insolent Bechar Keesa to inform Swamishri of their disapproval. As soon as he arrived, Bechar Keesa spoke rudely.

Swamishri calmly replied, "We need this land for the mandir. You should give it to us." Just one divine glance from Swamishri changed Bechar Keesa's mind.

Bechar Keesa asked, "How much land do you need? Let us measure it right now."

Swamishri handed him a measuring stick. Bechar Keesa measured out four stick-lengths of land.

"Add another two stick-lengths on my behalf," said Swamishri. Bechar Keesa immediately complied. Thus, the land for the gate was acquired.

Swamishri marked the land, using spikes to indicate the borders. Then, another villager, Dhanji Matadar came to protest. He was about to pull out one of the spikes when Swamishri warned him, "Matadar! This spike has been driven into the head of Sheshnag, so don't pull it out." Still he did not listen and pulled out the spike. To his horror, the point of the spike was covered with blood. Terrified, he immediately placed the spike back into the ground.

Realizing Swamishri's greatness, Bechar Keesa fell at his feet and apologized. Swamishri forgave him and instructed him to help in the mandir's construction.

Spiritual aspirants from all over Gujarat would now come to Bochasan. For years, devotees had discussed the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in private, afraid of the outrage it might cause. Now, this *upasana* had been enshrined in Bochasan, the heart of Charotar. Devotees freely exclaimed, "Akshar-Purushottam *ni* Jai!" They spoke openly about the glory of Akshar-Purushottam.

In Vartal, Sadguru Balmukund Swami of Junagadh once remarked, "By consecrating the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis*, Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has clarified what our

Sampraday's *upasana* should be. Until now, people developed *upasana* towards several deities and incarnations. Now, the true *upasana* of Shriji Maharaj and his choicest devotee has been established. Our Sampraday's *upasana* has been clearly defined."

Mahamukta Krishnaji Ada of Rajkot would also say, "Now, if you want to openly discuss true knowledge, you may go to Bochasan. Indeed, Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has rendered a great service to the entire Sampraday."

36. The Splendour of Sarangpur

Within a short period of time, Swamishri had constructed a mandir in Bochasan.

In Gadhada, Bhimji Kothari, who despised Swamishri from the very beginning, wrote a letter to Gordhanbhai of Vartal, "Yagnapurushdasji has built a mandir in the region of Gujarat amongst cowardly pushovers like you. But, let him try to build a mandir in the region of Kathiawad on this side of the Sabarmati River. Then he will realize who he is up against."

Little did Bhimji Kothari know that it was Shriji Maharaj who was building these mandirs through Swamishri. Swamishri was not building mandirs to compete against others. Rather, he wished to fulfil the promises given by Shriji Maharaj to his devotees.

The devotees of Sarangpur were dearer than life to Swamishri. At their request, Swamishri came to Sarangpur. One day, he was going for a bath at Narayan Kund, a large well sanctified by Shriji Maharaj.

While walking, Swamishri stopped exactly where the mandir stands today. Here, he addressed Motibhai, who had accompanied him, "Motibhai! Shriji Maharaj had wished for a mandir to be built here. He had promised the devotees accordingly. Therefore, a mandir shall certainly stand here." So saying, Swamishri continued walking. Returning from his bath, Swamishri again stopped at that same location, "Motibhai, compose a kirtan describing the mandir we want to build in Sarangpur."

Swamishri's strange request puzzled Motibhai. He thought to himself, "The mandir in Bochasan is still unfinished. There is no money in the mandir accounts. Still, Swamishri dares to have such aspirations."

Suddenly, something remarkable happened. Motibhai saw a towering three-storey mandir with golden pinnacles standing before him. He saw the *murtis* of Dham, Dhami and Mukta in a *sinhasan* in the central sanctum. Motibhai was astounded to see a mandir as beautiful and as majestic as the one which stands there today. The words of a kirtan gracefully flowed from his lips:

"Shri Sārangpurni shobhā saji ati sāri,
joi aloukik adbhut Dhām avikāri…"

"I beheld the immense splendour of Sarangpur, a remarkable and eternal celestial abode…"

All of Motibhai's doubts were removed. He realized that Swamishri was capable of bringing up countless such mandirs in an instant.

37. The Meeting of Ganga and Ocean

Swamishri and Jnanjivandas in Rajkot

Krishnacharandasji was the leading disciple of Madhavcharandasji, who himself had been one of Gunatitanand Swami's disciples in Junagadh. Krishnacharandas Swami's disciples were all known for their saintly virtues. Little Jhina Bhagat, however, stood out from the rest. Jhina had been told of Shastri Yagnapurushdasji's greatness by Krishnaji Ada and many other devotees. He was eager to have Swamishri's darshan. To fulfil his wish, Krishnaji Ada had invited Swamishri to Rajkot. Swamishri complied and came to Rajkot from Sarangpur.

Jhina Bhagat was overjoyed. His wish to have Swamishri's darshan was fulfilled.

During their first meeting, he was drawn to Swamishri. Feeling content, his mind was engrossed in Swamishri's divine image.

From Rajkot, Swamishri returned to Sarangpur. The devotees here requested that he build a mandir. Swamishri agreed to do so. The house of Pitha Khachar was purchased. It would serve as a place of worship until the new mandir was finished.

Bhimjibhai Kothari was alarmed when he heard that Swamishri had acquired the house. However, he consoled himself, thinking, "Acquiring a few rooms is a long way from building a mandir." He remained confident that Swamishri would fail.

Swamishri now visited the villages near Sarangpur as well as the region of Jhalavad. Wherever he went, he spread the message of Akshar-Purushottam.

Zaverbhai, the Diwan of Limbdi, learned that Swamishri had acquired Pitha Khachar's house. Delightedly he offered, "Swami, if you are willing to build a mandir in Sarangpur, I will ask Thakor Saheb, the king of Limbdi, to give you the land."

Swamishri replied, "We don't have much money. Also, the work in Bochasan is still unfinished. Still, if you are willing to have the land assigned to us, we will build a small mandir."

Zaverbhai knew Swamishri too well. Such a small piece of land would not serve Swamishri's purpose.

He replied, "Swami! Please ask for more land, I will have it granted to you."

Swamishri asked for twenty-four acres. Through Zaverbhai's efforts, the land was acquired from the king of Limbdi. Extra land was also purchased from Shermiya of Dholka.

Although the land had been acquired, building a mandir was no easy task. There was too little money and limited manpower. There was also opposition from all sides. Those who opposed Swamishri were spreading lies from village to village, "These people are Bandias. Do not give them food. If they come into the mandir in your village, throw them out. These sadhus have defied the Acharya and Vartal mandir."

Gullible minds fell prey to such propaganda. Some people avoided Swamishri out of fear of persecution from those who opposed him. Even so, several brave devotees risked their lives to side with Swamishri against such fierce opposition.

Swamishri's sadhus were equally courageous. They were not discouraged by the hardships. They always smiled and lived cheerfully. With no cooking vessels available, they cooked *khichdi* in empty kerosene tins. Even buttermilk that had turned sour was a luxury. They sometimes walked five or six miles before receiving alms. The mandir lacked funds. Worst of all, the opposition often uttered discouraging words to break their morale. Even then, these sadhus remained undaunted.

People would taunt them, "How will you build a mandir? At most, you might be able to make a small shrine here."

Despite hearing such words, the sadhus remained in good spirits. The heavy work took its toll on their bodies as they worked day and night, sometimes without even receiving a whole meal. However, because of their firm conviction in Akshar-Purushottam and their affection for Swamishri, they never lost their courage.

Soon, Jnanjivandas Swami, previously known as Jhina Bhagat, was inspired by

Krishnaji Ada to leave Junagadh mandir and join Swamishri in Bochasan. Several other sadhus from Junagadh also accompanied him.

Jnanjivandas was known for his inclination towards austerity and detachment. When he was leaving Junagadh, he was permitted to take his favourite *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj, worshipped by Gunatitanand Swami himself, from the mandir with him.

Leaving Junagadh, they first arrived in Rajkot and stayed with Krishnaji Ada. Krishnaji Ada called Swamishri to Rajkot. Swamishri soon arrived. Having Swamishri's darshan, the sadhus experienced tremendous peace within. Then they all accompanied Swamishri back to Sarangpur.

38. Swamishri's Greatness

Swamishri then went to Nadiad.

Here, Dolatrambhai invited Swamishri to his house to eat. He was aware of Swamishri's greatness. Even back in Vartal, he had known and respected Swamishri.

Dolatrambhai was an eminent scholar of Gujarati and Sanskrit literature and also a member of the management committee of Vartal mandir. He knew that Swamishri had separated from Vartal only to spread the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He did not, however, understand what this *upasana* was. He had faith that Swamishri's actions and beliefs were justified by the scriptures.

Dolatrambhai was eager to understand Swamishri's principles. Swamishri, too, wanted to explain his beliefs to Dolatrambhai.

Delighted to see Swamishri after ten years, Dolatrambhai asked, "Swami! Do you wish to one day rejoin Vartal?"

Swamishri replied, "If they acknowledge the true meaning of Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 21, then I do."

Dolatrambhai asked, "What is so important about this particular Vachanamrut that you insist that they acknowledge it?"

Quoting the Vachanamrut and elaborating upon it with relevant examples, Swamishri spoke extensively about the greatness of God and the God-realized Sadhu. He explained that the main principle of *moksha*, is said to be grasped only when one develops conviction in the manifest form of God and his Sadhu.

Dolatrambhai was also impressed by Swamishri's ability to clearly explain himself. He now understood some very essential spiritual concepts. Firstly, that Gunatitanand Swami was Mul Akshar. Secondly, that one must develop conviction in both Akshar and Purushottam. And finally, both of these entities were present before him in Shastri Yagnapurushdasji.

Dolatrambhai exclaimed, "Swami! You have revealed the true *upasana*, a task for which Shriji Maharaj would have had to return to this world. Your greatness is immeasurable. You have consecrated the *panchdhatu murtis* of Maharaj and Swami, but

in future, your glory will grow so vast that your disciples will consecrate a golden *murti* of you."

Hearing his words, everyone marvelled at Swamishri's hidden glory.

Swamishri once went to Vadodara to examine a few *murtis*. By the insistence of his devotees, he was taken to Kamatibaug. Against his liking, the first ever photograph of Swamishri was taken.

Swamishri spoke sternly to the devotees, "If you try to distribute this photograph, I will tear it up and throw it away."

39. We Became Sadhus for Gunatit

The opposition tried relentlessly to disrupt the construction of Sarangpur mandir. But, those who previously taunted, "The most you will be able to build is a little shrine" or "You will give up and abandon the work," watched dumbfounded as the construction progressed. As the day of the *murti-pratishtha* quickly approached, the opposition thought about how they could stop Swamishri.

The old Sampraday's sadhus thought to themselves, "Maybe by misleading Thakor Saheb, the king of Limbdi, we can halt the work." They invited Thakor Saheb to the old Hanuman mandir in Sarangpur.

"Thakor Saheb, our deities of worship are Radha-Krishna, but, this Shastri neglects Radha-Krishna and wants to consecrate the *murtis* of his own gurus, Jaga and Praga. Only if the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna are consecrated in the central sanctum of the mandir will it be proper."

As planned, these words influenced the king in their favour. He then went to the new mandir site to meet Swamishri. Swamishri received him honourably.

The king asked, "In the old Hanuman mandir, they have the miraculous stick of Gopalanand Swami which can exorcize ghosts. Do you possess anything of that nature?"

These words provoked Himatlalbhai, a prominent businessman of Botad. He exclaimed, "Bapu! This Swami is capable of creating another miraculous stick. Word of his greatness has spread throughout the Sampraday."

"I too have experienced Swamishri's greatness," agreed the king.

Thakor Saheb then asked where the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna would be consecrated. He even insisted that they be consecrated in the central sanctum.

Thakor Saheb had given Swamishri the land for the mandir. He was a powerful figure, one not to be antagonized. It was Thakor Saheb who had helped their cause in many ways on many occasions. Even so, Swamishri was not intimidated by the king.

He spoke boldly, "It is only for our God, the supreme Sahajanand Swami, and for Gunatitanand Swami that we have suffered countless hardships. It is for them that we have become sadhus. Therefore, the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami will be consecrated in the central sanctum and the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna shall be

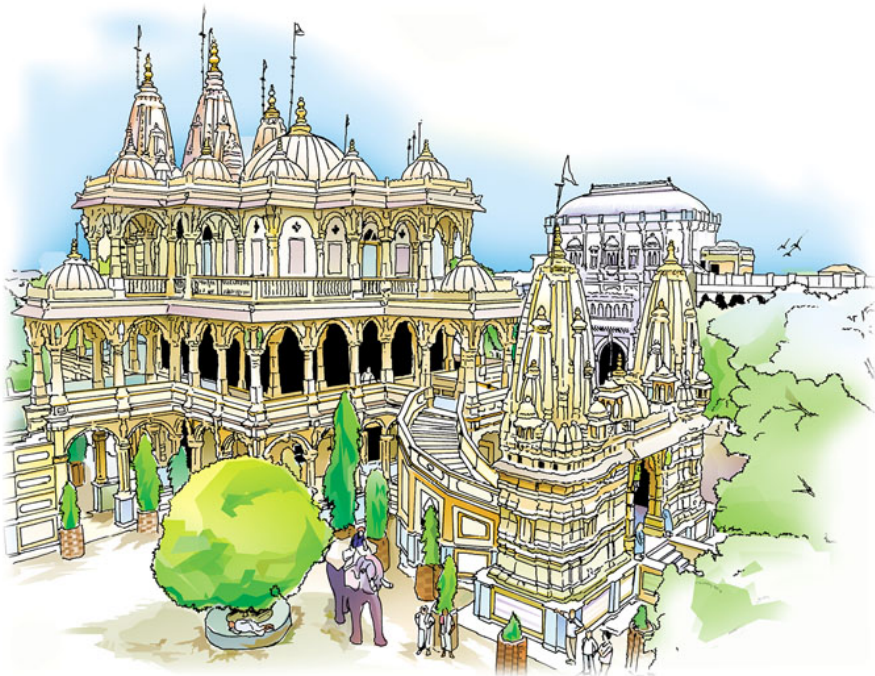
consecrated in the first sanctum."

Having heard Swamishri's bold, authorative, and clear-cut reply, the king gave in.

"Please ignore my words. Do what you feel is appropriate."

The king's hidden apology pleased Swamishri. Once again, the opposition's tactics were thwarted.

40. The Murti-Pratishtha of Sarangpur Mandir



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur

The work of the mandir proceeded at full speed. The sadhus and devotees worked hard, ignoring physical strain. One day, Sadguru Balmukund Swami of Junagadh was passing by the construction site on his way to Narayan Kund for a bath. He was pleased by the devotion with which the sadhus were serving. He called Kothari Shankar Bhagat and several sadhus and blessed them, "You are privileged to receive this *seva* of Maharaj and Swami. Not even Shriji Maharaj's five hundred *paramhansas* were fortunate enough to receive this *seva*. The force that drives you is not your own. *Akshar-muktas* are working through you. You are indeed very fortunate."

These words lifted the spirits of all. Everyone now began to work twice as hard.

The mandir was soon ready. The auspicious day of 8 May 1916 (Vaishakh *sud* 6, Samvat 1972) was chosen for the *murti-pratishtha*. Swamishri and Nirgundas Swami made excellent preparations for the celebrations. Thousands of devotees were expected to come, so Swamishri instructed the sadhus and devotees to make eight thousand

kilograms of *shiro* from *soji*.

After making *shiro* for five days, the cooks were exhausted and refused to cook anymore. As a result only five thousand kilograms of *shiro* was ready.

"By God's grace, this will be enough. There will not be any shortage. Do not worry," assured Swamishri.

On the day of the *murti-pratishtha*, Swamishri recited, from the Harililamrut, the incident of Shriji Maharaj promising Jiva Khachar to build a mandir in Sarangpur. After the *yagna* was completed, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha*. As part of the traditional Vedic rituals, he held a mirror in front of the *murtis*. The mirror cracked, indicating the divine presence of Maharaj and Swami in the *murtis*.

After the *arti*, everyone sat in rows to eat. With the intention of depleting the stock of *shiro* and discrediting Swamishri, several troublemakers sneaked into the kitchen. They carried off several baskets full of *shiro* from the storage containers. Now the stock of *shiro* was half empty. Everyone wondered, "We have not even started to serve the *shiro*. How has half of it already disappeared?"

The devotees serving in the kitchen ran to Swamishri and asked, "How can we feed all these people with so little *shiro*?"

Swamishri had a portion of the farm cleared out and fenced it with wooden beams. He selected a team of trustworthy devotees and stamped their back with his own handprints using vermillion. Only these devotees would be allowed to carry baskets full of *shiro* to serve the guests. After making these rigid arrangements, Swamishri covered the containers. He placed a *murti* of Shriji Maharaj and kindled a *divo* on top of one of the lids.

From morning until midnight, the *shiro* was served to over two hundred thousand devotees. The entire village ate the mandir's *shiro* for eight days. Even then, the *shiro* stayed fresh and fragrant, without running out. Finally, the remaining *shiro* was distributed to the cattle farms in the neighbouring villages.

Everyone was delighted to witness such a miracle. They were further convinced of Swamishri's greatness. Devotees living near Sarangpur would call Swamishri to their village to do *padhramanis* and give discourses.

At the request of his devotees, Swamishri went to Mojidad. The devotees there had affectionately arranged a grand reception.

Surprisingly, Swamishri told them, "It is not appropriate for a sadhu to be given such a grand reception." He turned and looked at guru Ganesh Bhakta, a local devotee and continued, "What do you say Ganesh Bhakta? Would it look good for a sadhu to let himself be honoured in such a way?"

Just seconds earlier, the same question had popped into Ganesh Bhakta's mind. He was amazed that Swamishri knew what he was thinking. He was now convinced that Swamishri was no ordinary sadhu, but some great incarnation and the favourite devotee of Shriji Maharaj.

41. Steadfast Faith

After travelling through the villages of Gujarat, Swamishri arrived in Sarangpur. Even after the *murti-pratishtha*, the work of the mandir continued.

Soma Bhagat and Aksharpurush Swami were strong workers. They could lift massive stones as if they were feathers and hurl them to the side. One huge stone, weighing three thousand kilograms, was being lifted up to its place in the middle of the mandir. The stone was tied with seven thick ropes. As everyone pulled, they chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun*.

Suddenly, one after another, the ropes began to snap. The stone was now held in mid-air by only one rope. If it fell, the other carved stones arranged below would be smashed. The stone might also land on someone and cause severe injury or death. Everyone watched, worried about the disaster that might come about.

Someone ran to call Swamishri. Swamishri arrived and immediately raised his hand.

"The stone will not fall now. Lift it to the top," he exclaimed.

He then told Soma Bhagat to climb onto the stone and re-tie the ropes. Climbing onto the stone now would be suicidal. The one remaining rope would certainly snap, sending Soma Bhagat and the stone crashing down. It would kill him instantly. Everyone watched anxiously.

Soma Bhagat, however, had complete faith in Swamishri's words. The people holding the rope felt a thundering jolt as he quickly climbed onto the stone. All held their breath. Using all his strength, he re-tied all six of the broken ropes. He climbed back off the stone and immediately bowed at the feet of Swamishri.

With all his heart, Swamishri blessed his faithful devotee. Those who witnessed this miraculous feat, further realized Swamishri's greatness.

42. The Sadhu – The Greatest Benefactor

Swamishri with Sayajirao Gaekwad of Vadodara

From Sarangpur, Swamishri travelled to several villages and finally arrived in Bochasan. The Maharaja of Vadodara, Shrimant Sayajirav Gayakwad, was visiting Bhadran. Swamishri invited him to Bochasan through Zaverbhai.

The Maharaja sent a message in reply, “I do not have more than fifteen minutes to spare. I shall, therefore, come only for fifteen minutes.”

Nirgun Swami remarked, “He may say so, but he will remain for forty-five minutes. When he does, understand the reason to be Swamishri’s greatness.”

The Maharaja was received honourably and then escorted to the mandir for darshan. Then, he was brought to meet Swamishri.

“So this is the Swamiji whose fame has spread today throughout Gujarat!” he exclaimed before bowing to Swamishri.

Sitting in Swamishri's presence, the Maharaja lost all track of time. He stayed for forty-five minutes. They talked at great length on many matters. The Maharaja was saddened by the death of his son. Swamishri eased his sorrow and advised him that as he was now fifty years of age, he should hand over his responsibilities, embrace the *vanprasth ashram*, and accept the refuge of a true guru.

Swamishri's words moved him. He was especially impressed that Swamishri, without the slightest fear of upsetting a monarch like himself, gave such truthful advice. In the past, many had praised him. Swamishri, however, had advised him for his own good. He thought very highly of Swamishri and bowed before taking his leave. Swamishri placed his hand on the Maharaja's head, blessing him as he left.

Once, Swamishri was giving discourses in Anand. Suddenly, someone screamed that Motibhai's house was on fire. Swamishri, while staying seated before the assembly, miraculously put out the fire in Motibhai's house. His arms, to the surprise of the devotees, suddenly appeared burned to the elbows. Motibhai applied some soothing oil to the skin of both of Swamishri's arms. Everyone thus experienced Swamishri's compassion at first-hand. Swamishri's feat was symbolic of how he endured hardships for his devotees. Everyone bowed before Swamishri.

43. Negotiations for a Compromise with Vartal

Some of Swamishri's disciples had now been elected to the management committee of Vartal. Swamishri's return to Vartal would greatly bolster the Sampraday. Therefore, his disciples hoped and began working for such a compromise.

Gordhanbhai Kothari had now retired. Still, he advised Swamishri and the devotees that they should compromise with Vartal only if Acharya Maharaj endorses and performs *arti* to the newly consecrated *murtis* of Dham, Dhami, and Mukta. Gordhanbhai's support and conviction pleased Swamishri.

The sadhus of Vartal were outraged by the idea. They thought to themselves, "Shastri Yagnapurushdasji is capable of swaying the entire Sampraday in his own favour. Once he returns, everyone will neglect us.

They cleverly told Acharya Maharaj, "We will indeed be delighted if a compromise is reached. After all, if a scholar like Yagnapurushdasji returns to Vartal, Satsang will flourish. But, their mandirs are still unfinished. If we compromise now, then we will be burdened with an expenditure of nearly two or three hundred thousand rupees in order to complete their mandirs. Instead, we should wait until the mandirs are finished and then compromise."

Acharya Maharaj was convinced by their shrewd reasoning. Then all efforts at a compromise were called off.

Swamishri remarked, "Perhaps Shriji Maharaj wants to accomplish even more work and inspire conviction in Akshar-Purushottam through us. Therefore, whatever has happened is for the best."

We must indeed wonder: If a compromise had been reached, would the Akshar-Purushottam mandirs in Atladra, Gondal, and Gadhada exist today?

Swamishri then came to Sarangpur. Narsinhdas Sheth, a Vaishnav devotee, came from Mahuva. He wished to consecrate the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan in his mandir in Mahuva. However, learning that Swamishri was ill he did not mention his wish.

Three days passed. Swamishri finally asked, "Have you come to take me to Mahuva to open the mandir there? Let us go. I was born for building mandirs."

Swamishri cast aside his illness and went to Mahuva.

Thereafter, Swamishri travelled to several villages and arrived in Bochasan. From there, he reached Anand. Now, Swamishri wanted to go to Sarangpur by train. Because he did not keep money with him, he needed someone to pay his fare. The devotees of Anand were out of town attending a wedding. Thus, Swamishri wandered back and forth four times between the mandir and the railway. Finally, he met Gordhanbhai Keshavlal on the road. Gordhanbhai bought the tickets and Swamishri returned to Sarangpur.

Whenever Swamishri came by train, he would have to walk from Botad to Sarangpur mandir. He would do so, carrying his own bundle on his head and his own *jholi* on his shoulders. Even if a younger sadhu was with him, he still carried his own things. Whether it was cold, hot, or even raining, Swamishri always walked these seven and a half miles.

44. Sixty-Eight Places of Pilgrimage

From Sarangpur, Swamishri went to the village of Ashi. Jnanjivandas Swami, more commonly known by devotees as Yogi Swami, accompanied Swamishri. Yogi Swami would wake up at three in the morning and, with his sweet voice, sing *prabhatiya* bhajans. One morning, he sang Narsinh Mehta's famous kirtan, "*Prān thaki mune Vaishnav vahālā…*" (A Vaishnav, or devotee of God, is dearer to me than life.) He continued singing, "*Adasath tirath mārā Sant ne charane, koti Ganga koti Kashi re…*" (The sixty-eight places of pilgrimage, including the Ganga River and the holy city of Kashi, reside at the feet of my Sadhu.)

Yogi Swami's singing annoyed Ranchhod Patel, who often slept in the village mandir.

"Maharaj! Do not sing such a silly bhajan. In this Kaliyug, such a sadhu does not exist. Do not sing such nonsense."

Yogi Swami obliged, "All right, I will sing another bhajan." He then started another bhajan.

That night, after giving discourses Swamishri went to sleep in the mandir. Ranchhodbhai sat on the floor nearby. Because of his old age and frail health, he rarely ever slept at night.

Everyone else drifted off to sleep. Ranchhodbhai got up and closed the front gate of

the mandir and sat down to turn the beads of his *mala*. After about an hour, the gate was slowly pushed open. A divine cow, extremely white in colour, came inside. She came to Swamishri's feet and bowed her head three times.

Ranchhodbhai could not believe his eyes. The cow then quietly left the mandir. Ranchhodbhai followed to see where it would go. As he stepped outside, he faintly saw the cow in the moonlight for a short distance. Then, the cow vanished. He searched everywhere, but found no trace of it. He was convinced that the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage must have taken the form of a cow and come to be sanctified at Swamishri's feet.

When Yogi Swami awoke at 3.00 a.m., Ranchhodbhai requested, "Maharaj! Please sing that kirtan about the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage."

"Why? Just yesterday you told me not to sing it," inquired Yogi Swami.

"I had darshan of the Ganga in the form of a cow. Now, my ignorance is gone," replied Ranchhodbhai. He then related all that had happened. He exclaimed that Shastriji Maharaj was indeed a powerful incarnation. Thus, Ranchhodbhai's ignorance was removed. Swamishri then returned to Sarangpur.

One day, Swamishri remarked, "Acharya Lakshmiprasadji has indeed helped us. Because of him, we left Vartal and were able to build mandirs revealing the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. We have been able to explain this knowledge to so many people."

Swamishri bore no ill will for anyone. He was always inclined to see the good in all.

45. Alms for Akshar-Purushottam

Kuberbhai, a senior devotee, requested that Swamishri come to Bhavnagar. Swamishri arrived and announced one morning, "I want to ask for alms in this city."

Kuberbhai replied, "We are all in your service here. If you go and beg for alms, we will all be embarrassed."

Swamishri replied, "You all do tremendous *seva*. But, Shriji Maharaj himself begged for alms, so that countless spiritual aspirants would have his darshan and be liberated. We also want to follow his command and do the same."

Even in Sarangpur, Swamishri begged for alms. Nirgundas Swami once insisted that Swamishri not do so.

"We are all in your service. Why then do you insist on begging for alms?"

Swamishri replied, "Even if we sold ourselves for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam, it would not be enough. Even if someone puts just a grain in my *jholi*, I will take the soul to Akshardham."

Hearing Swamishri's noble sentiments, no one could speak further.

Once, when Swamishri was giving discourses in Sarangpur, Bapubha asked, "At present, what can we do to please Maharaj and Swami?"

Swamishri immediately replied, "At present, Shriji Maharaj is pleased if we build

mandirs which spread the message of true *upasana* and if we consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in their central sanctum. Even if you contribute to this cause by helping to dig the foundation, lifting baskets of mud, moving stones, or donating a single paisa, Shriji Maharaj will purify you and certainly take you to Akshardham."

46. Divine Samadhi

Thereafter, Shriji Maharaj showed the miracle of samadhi in Satsang through Swamishri. The first instance was when Acharya Radharamanprasad was doing darshan of the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj in Sarangpur. He experienced samadhi. In his trance, Shriji Maharaj gave him the very napkin that the *pujari* had offered earlier to Maharaj's *murti*. That very napkin appeared in his hand. Down in the *yagna* arena, many devotees spotted a beam of light. Soon thereafter, three balls of light containing the images of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalaland Swami were seen disappearing into the sky.

Once, Odhavjibhai, a devotee of Botad, came to meet Swamishri in Sarangpur. As he listened to Swamishri's discourses, he felt peace. He then went to the guesthouse. There, he observed five or six devotees absorbed in a spiritual discussion. In fact, wherever he looked, be it the mandir or guesthouse, he saw small groups of sadhus and devotees talking about Satsang. In the entire campus of the mandir, no one talked about anything except God. They had forgotten the world around them. Such was Swamishri's divine impact on the sadhus and devotees. Odhavjibhai returned to Botad that day, realizing Swamishri's greatness even more.

Swamishri left Sarangpur and came to Navagam. Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March had arrived in this village. Gandhiji had heard of Swamishri's saintliness and therefore wished to meet him. He invited Swamishri. Swamishri complied and came to meet him.

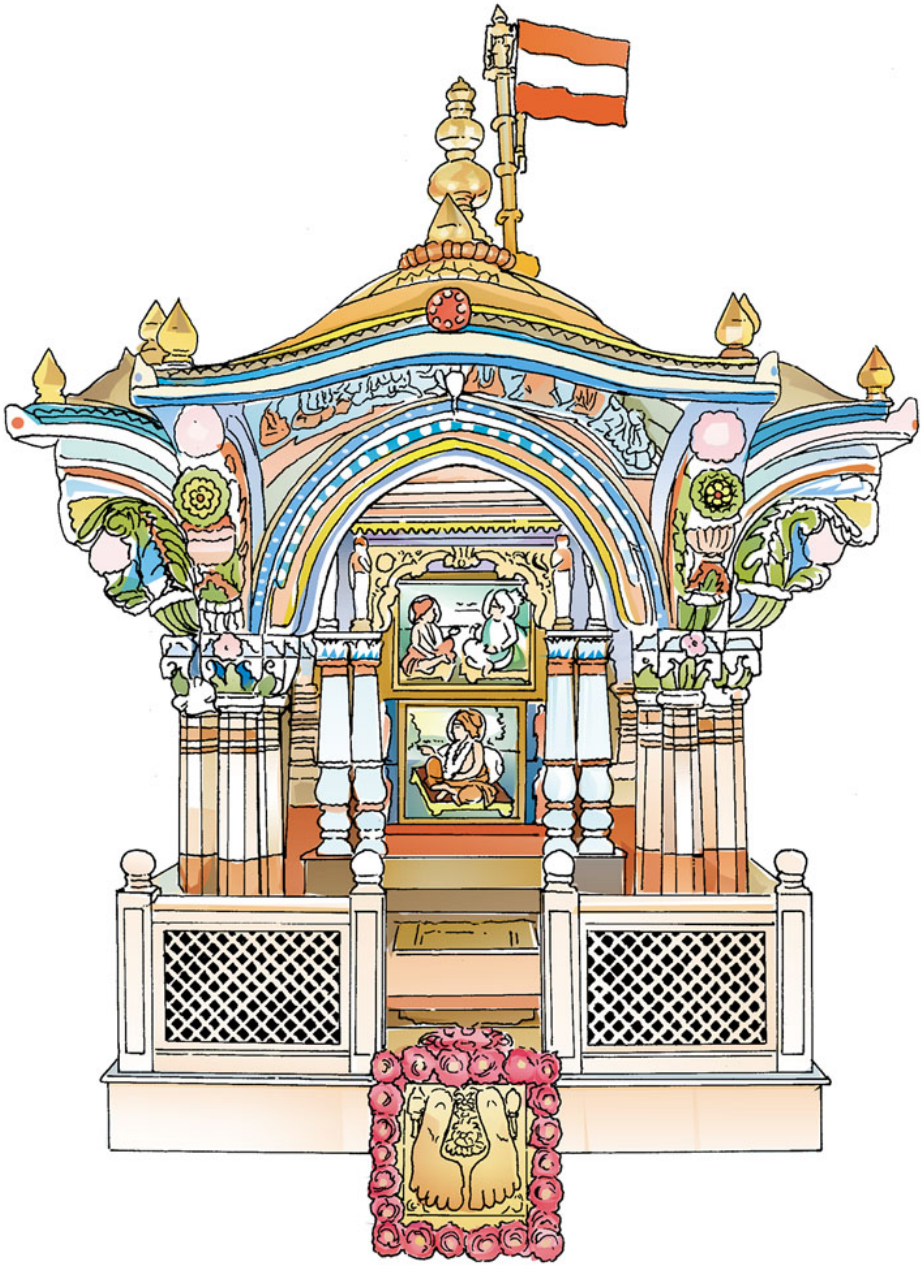
Gandhiji humbly asked, "Swamiji! Please bless us so that we succeed in our work."

Swamishri replied, "This Jogi Swami will do *malas* from today so that our country gains independence through your efforts. God will be with you if you observe *niyam* dharma."

Gandhiji was pleased with these blessings. Swamishri then returned to his lodgings.

Yogi Swami was indeed compassionate. At Swamishri's behest, he daily did *malas* for the independence of the country. Because of his bhakti and the efforts of patriots, the country gained independence.

47. Akshar Mandir

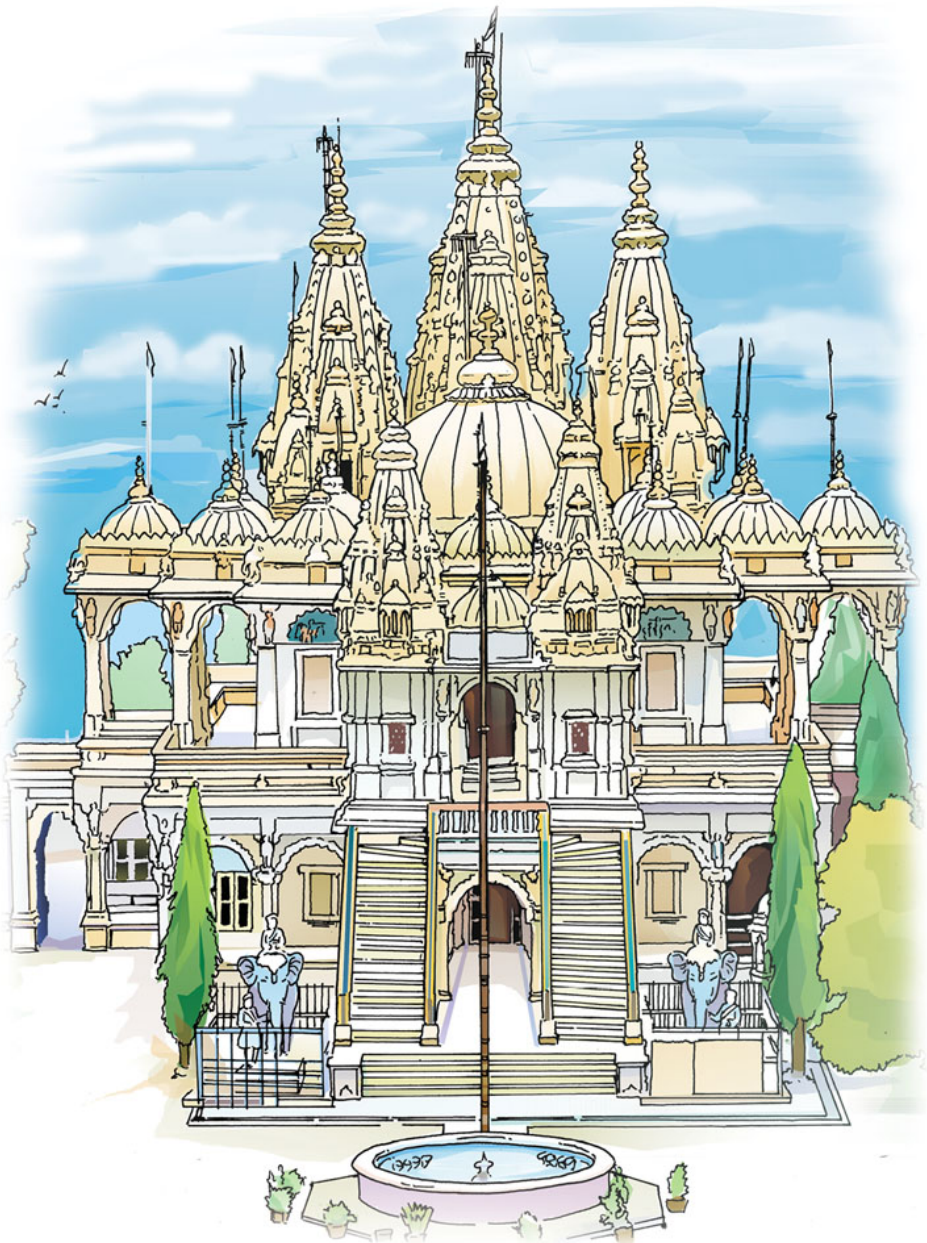


Akshar Deri, Gondal

Haribhai Amin of Virsad, came to meet Swamishri in Sarangpur. Haribhai had met with the king of Gondal to acquire the piece of land on which Akshar Deri stood. The land was worth at least two hundred thousand rupees, but Haribhai negotiated the cost down to twenty-five thousand rupees.

The king decided to sell the land only if certain conditions were met. He stated, "The Akshar Deri must remain intact on this land, the mandir that is built over the land

should be finished in three years, and at least one million rupees must be spent on the project."



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal

Haribhai was confident that Shastriji Maharaj was capable of such a feat. He came to Swamishri and announced, "Swami! I've purchased the land in Gondal for two hundred thousand rupees."

Swamishri read his mind and replied, “You purchased this land not for two hundred thousand, but for twenty-five thousand rupees and the king has set certain conditions to the transaction. Even then, Haribhai, do not worry. Two million rupees will easily be used on this land.”

Swamishri’s words relieved Haribhai. He went to Bharuch to gather the funds to pay for the land.

After the Jaljhilani festival, the Swaminarayan *dhun* was chanted for twenty-four hours. Swamishri arrived in the assembly and played the *dilruba*. Moved by the sweet notes played by Swamishri, four or five devotees and two sadhus experienced samadhi and had darshan of Shriji Maharaj.

One of the sadhus, Nandkishoredas, had a bulky body. Even then, he was able to flex his limbs and sit in very difficult yogic postures, since, while in samadhi, Gopalanand Swami was teaching him yoga.

On the morning of Punam, Swamishri sent all of the devotees to harvest millet from the farm. The devotees became exhausted from the *seva*. In the afternoon, Swamishri himself carried a pot of cool water to the farm and quenched their thirst. As soon as they saw Swamishri, some of the devotees experienced samadhi at the farm.

A few days later, Haribhai requested Swamishri to accompany him to finalize the documents for the purchase of the land in Gondal. The funds had already been collected. After finalizing the transaction, Haribhai handed the possession of the land to Swamishri. News that the Akshar Deri had been acquired reached the devotees. Everyone was overjoyed.

Swamishri decided to have the groundbreaking ceremony for the mandir on 18 January 1932 (Posh *sud* 10, Samvat 1988). Thousands of devotees attended. The ceremony was conducted with great joy. The king of Gondal, overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the devotees on this occasion, caught a glimpse of Swamishri’s glory.

Swamishri then went to Rajpur (near Ahmedabad) to attend a *parayan*. Harmanbhai had come from Africa for Swamishri’s darshan. He had decided not to return to East Africa. He chose to stay in India and enjoy Swamishri’s divine presence.

Swamishri blessed him, “Go to Africa and try your best. Satsang will grow. It is Maharaj’s wish.” With these blessings, Harmanbhai returned to East Africa.

The king of Gondal had insisted that Swamishri complete the mandir in three years. However, Swamishri’s faithful sadhus and devotees worked day and night to finish the mandir in under two- and-a-half years. The *murti-pratishtha* was to be held on the auspicious day of 24 May 1934 (Vaishakh *sud* 10, Samvat 1990).

Swamishri invited all devotees to attend the celebrations. He wrote, “I want to bless whoever comes to this festival with Akshardham! Therefore, no one should miss out on this priceless opportunity.”

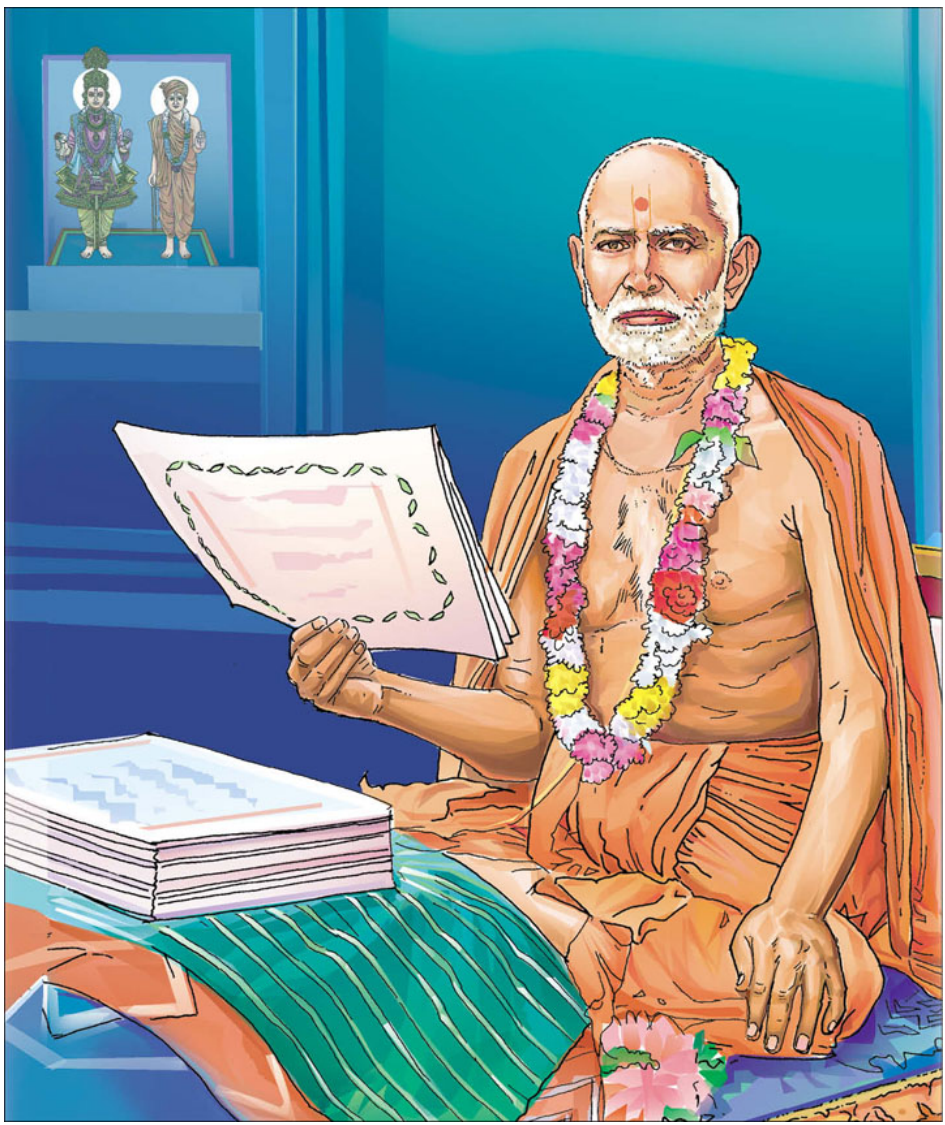
Yogi Swami won everyone’s heart through his tremendous *seva* during the festival. Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha*. The mirror that was held in front of the *murtis* cracked, thereby signifying the divine presence of Maharaj and Swami in the *murtis*. The victory calls of Akshar-Purushottam resounded everywhere. That night, in the Akshar Deri, Dharmaswarupdas Swami and three devotees experienced samadhi.

They all had darshan of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, and infinite *akshar-muktas*.

Swamishri spoke extensively about the importance of Akshar Deri. He predicted, "Here, a grand *thal* will be offered to God daily, as is done in Shrinathji. This will be the greatest location in the entire universe. Everyone's wishes will be fulfilled here."

To the delight of the devotees, Swamishri appointed Yogi Swami as the mahant of the mandir. It was only fitting that the mahant of such a divine mandir himself be so divine.

48. Invoking Indra



In September 1936 (Shravan, Samvat 1992), the devotees of Ahmedabad decided to hold a *parayan*. Everyone was worried about the lack of rain. The month of Bhadarva had arrived and it still had not rained. The devotees prayed to Swamishri.

Swamishri told the devotees, "Pray to Jogi Maharaj. He is compassionate. He will surely make a request to Maharaj."

Yogi Swami said, "I am only a servant. Everything is in Swamishri's hands. Let us do dhun. Swamishri will shower rain."

Swamishri said to Dharmaswarupdas, "Go into samadhi and put in a request to Shriji Maharaj."

Dharmaswarupdas went into samadhi and prayed to Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj told him, "Shastri Yagnapurushdasji is relieving the world of its burden of sin. Thus, no one will experience misery. It will surely rain."

That evening it rained lightly. It continued to rain lightly for two or three days. However, the devotees still were not satisfied with the rain.

On the third day, Dharmaswarupdas again went into samadhi and prayed again to Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj again assured him, "From today, there will be heavy rains."

While Dharmaswarupdas was still in samadhi, seven kilograms of *magas* appeared as *prasad* in his lap. Many witnessed this miracle. Airavat, Indra's celestial elephant possessing two trunks, then appeared. Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj and Indra climbed down from Airavat. Indra performed *pujan* of Swamishri.

Shriji Maharaj spoke to Dharmaswarupdas in *samadhi*, "Indra, the king of rain, has accompanied us. Now there will be no shortage of rain." Then, the five of them sat on Airavat and disappeared into the sky. Many devotees saw this miracle with their own eyes. Suddenly, lightning bolts flashed and thunder resounded in the skies. Heavy rains soon followed. Seeing such a miracle, people from all parts of Ahmedabad were drawn to Swamishri.

In 1838 (Samvat 1994), Someshvar Pithva organized a *parayan* on the Satsangijivan scripture in Gondal. Bhagwandas, a new devotee from Puna who had heard of Swamishri's greatness, came to listen.

He prayed for two wishes: Firstly, a mandir be built in Puna and secondly, that he be graced with a vision of Shriji Maharaj. In his mind, he resolved, "I shall eat only if Swamishri gives his blessings for a mandir in Puna and if I have darshan of Shriji Maharaj." He did not disclose his vow to anyone.

On the final day of the *parayan*, Swamishri was reciting from the Satsangijivan. Suddenly, Bhagwandas could no longer see Swamishri. In his place, Bhagwandas had darshan of Shriji Maharaj clad in rich clothes embroidered with golden threads. Maharaj had worn a crimson coloured turban and various ornaments. Bhagwandas informed Girdharbhai Patel, a devotee of Ahmedabad who was sitting next to him, of what he saw. Girdharbhai rubbed his eyes, but still saw Shastriji Maharaj and not Shriji Maharaj.

Girdharbhai remarked, “Here, I see Swamishri reading the discourse. I do not see Shriji Maharaj.”

Bhagwandas then stood up, interrupting the assembly, and described what he had seen. After Swamishri finished the *parayan*, Bhagwandas recounted the entire incident. Swamishri blessed Bhagwandas, “Maharaj has fulfilled your wish. You should eat now, and do not take such an oath again.”

Everyone who was sitting in the *parayan* was now convinced that Shriji Maharaj was present before them through Swamishri.

49. The Construction of Atladra Mandir Begins

Swamishri came to Vadodara. Three miles away, in the village of Atladra, lived Mathurbhai. People feared Mathurbhai just as they had feared the old Hirabhai Mukhi of Bochasan. Mathurbhai’s life revolved around sin. No one would have expected him to ever become a devotee. But, one day, just by hearing Swamishri’s name, his life began to change. He requested that Shastriji Maharaj build a mandir in Atladra.

Swamishri replied, “There is a place where Shriji Maharaj once came where Mulu Metar and Krishna Mali lived. If we acquire that sanctified piece of land, we will build a mandir.”

Mathurbhai assured Swamishri, “If you build a mandir on that place, I will get you as much land as you want.” Swamishri went to the location sanctified by Maharaj and identified exactly how much land he wanted.

The land identified by Swamishri was occupied by huts. Mathurbhai made new homes elsewhere and shifted the residents. Then, Mathurbhai handed over this land to Swamishri and prayed that he build a mandir.

Once, Harkha Patel, of Samadhiyala near Sarangpur, pleaded, “Swami! There is no water in my well so have mercy. Bless me so that water comes.”

Swamishri bluntly replied, “You are a *satsangi*. Yet, you eat without first bathing. How then will water come to your well? From now on, promise that if water appears in your well, you will always bathe before eating. Only then will your well remain filled with water.”

Thus, Swamishri inspired him to observe dharma.

Whenever Swamishri stayed in Sarangpur, he often seated the young Narayanswarupdasji Swami beside him. Swamishri would affectionately tutor him in Sanskrit. Swamishri often made him read out verses from the scriptures. Narayanswarupdasji’s sweet voice and his ability to read in Swamishri’s style pleased the devotees and Swamishri.

Swamishri often made Narayanswarupdasji read the Bhaktachintamani and Harililamrut out loud. Swamishri would then lovingly speak to him about various *satsang* topics. As he heard these discourses, Narayanswarupdasji grew closer to Swamishri.

The devotees of Surat requested that Swamshri come to Surat. A magnificent *parayan* was arranged. Swamishri spoke extensively and delighted everyone. Many devotees experienced samadhi. Krishnapriyacharyaji, Acharya of the Pranami Sampraday in Surat, was a great scholar, and had a deep knowledge of other religions.

Seeing the remarkable phenomenon of samadhi, Krishnapriyacharyaji was drawn to Swamishri. In Swamishri, he saw saintliness, scholarliness, and humility. He put aside the pride of being a scholar and an acharya. He humbly bowed before Swamishri's feet and then addressed the general assembly, "Akshar is Swami and Purushottam is Narayan. That is the true meaning of Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj has explained this to all. Today Shriji Maharaj is present through Shastriji Maharaj."

Hearing such words from an acharya of another Sampraday pleased all in the assembly.

50. First Celebration of Swamishri's Birthday

All of Swamishri's devotees wished to celebrate his eightieth birthday with great joy in Bochasan. Champakbhai Banker had come up with the idea and everyone had happily agreed. The devotees decided to offer one hundred and twenty-five thousand rupees to Swamishri on this occasion. Swamishri, saying that a sadhu cannot accept money, rejected the proposal. He told them to offer this money to God. He insisted that these funds be used in the service of Thakorji.

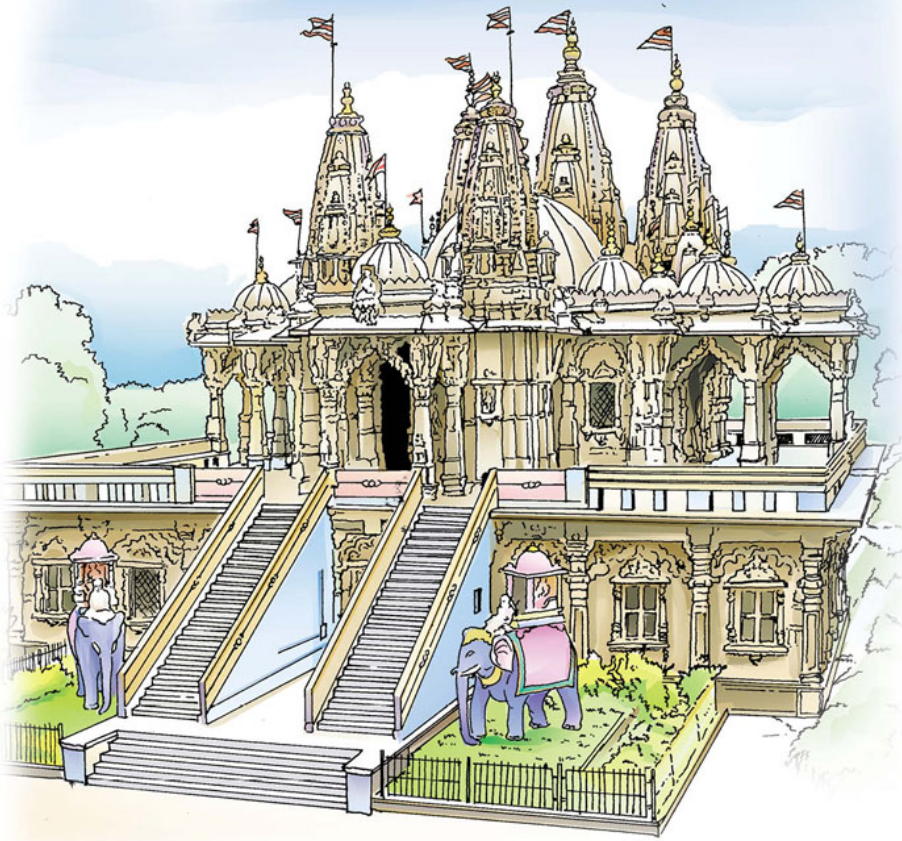
On 18 January 1945 (Vasant Panchmi, Samvat 2001), two hundred thousand devotees gathered in Bochasan. Many eminent guests had arrived from all over Gujarat. Chandulal Patel, the Director of Education in the city of Gondal, as well as other officers, noblemen, and prominent devotees came. Remembering Swamishri's virtues, they spoke of his greatness. Two hundred thousand people witnessed this divine event.

Thereafter Swamishri travelled to Atladra and then he went to Ahmedabad. Here, the yearly *parayan* took place. Swamishri read verses from the Bhagvat, giving brilliant discourses in between. Well-wishers, some from different religious backgrounds, and devotees all enjoyed the *parayan*.

Shastri Shri Vishvanathbhai, a great scholar and orator of the Vaishnav Sampraday, listened to Swamishri and exclaimed, "Today, the nectar of devotion that I have tasted by listening to Swamishri leads me to conclude that although Shukji and Shridhar know the essence of the Bhagvat, those who have heard the Bhagvat from the mouth of Swamishri must admit that not even Shridhar could explain the Bhagvat as well. Swamishri is the manifest form of God. Only one who is the form of God, can enable others to taste this nectar. Through these discourses, Swamishri has showered us with peace and joy."

The devotees were extremely delighted to hear such praise from a Vaishnav devotee.

51. A Fourth Shikharbaddh Mandir



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Atladra

Swamishri returned to Atladra to perform the *murti-pratishtha*. The auspicious day of 12 July 1945 (Ashadh *sud* 3, Samvat 2001) had been decided for the consecration ceremony. Two days before the *pratishtha* was to take place heavy rains began. How could the *murti-pratishtha* be done in such rain? Worried, everyone approached Swamishri and prayed.

Smiling, Swamishri said, "This is Maharaj's work. So, when the time comes, the rain will stop. Do not worry."

The following day, it stopped raining. The remaining work was completed on time. The next day, a magnificent *yagna* took place. Brahmins chanted mantras according to Vedic tradition. Swamishri ceremoniously consecrated the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, and Gopalanand Swami.

Swamishri exclaimed, "This Atladra mandir will become the greatest of mandirs. At present, it is far from Vadodara. But, one day it will be near Vadodara. Atladra will

become a suburb of Vadodara."

Today these words have proven true.

When Swamishri came to Anand, Shri Bhailalbhai Patel, a bold and highly respected public worker, invited Swamishri to Vidyanagar. Bhailalbhai had made extensive plans to transform Vidyanagar. If Swamishri blessed his plans and sanctified the land, Bhailalbhai was confident that this undeveloped land would one day sprout into a magnificent educational centre. Bhailalbhai knew Swamishri from a very young age and was well aware of Swamishri's greatness.

Pleased by Bhailalbhai's affection, Swamishri arrived in Vidyanagar. Bhailalbhai explained his project in detail. Swamishri toured the land, showering flower petals to sanctify the land.

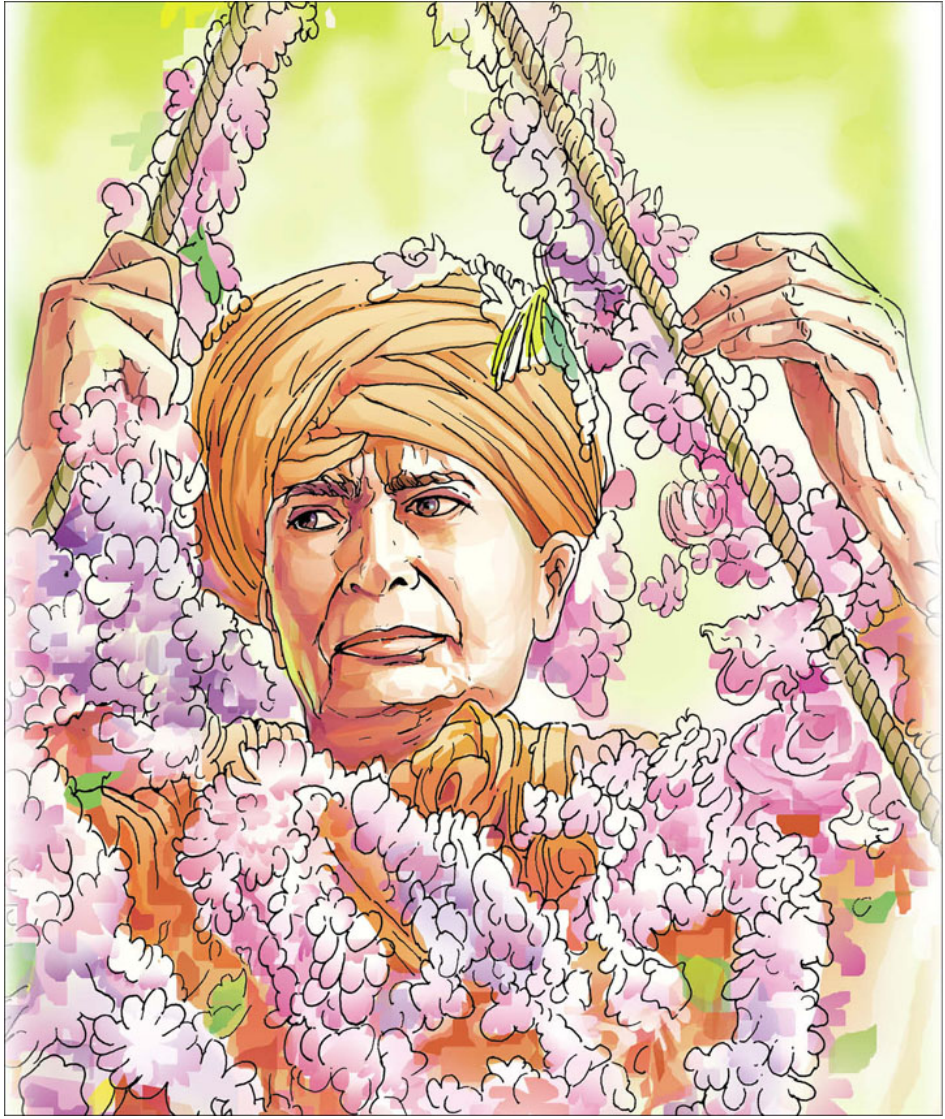
He blessed Bhailalbhai, "Your wish shall be fulfilled. Here, a great centre for learning will develop. Thousands of students will benefit from education."

Bhailalbhai was extremely pleased by Swamishri's blessings.

The devotees in Karachi insisted that Swamishri visit them. Swamishri, accompanied by many sadhus and devotees, arrived in Karachi. A *parayan* on the Satsangijivan scripture took place. Once again, Swamishri spoke extensively. During his stay, Swamishri regularly visited the old Maninagar Swaminarayan mandir for darshan. On the final day of the *parayan*, he addressed a vast assembly of devotees, "A time of disaster soon approaches this land. All of you, must leave your possessions, and return to your native place in our country."

A few months later, Karachi was overwhelmed by political turmoil. Swamishri's words proved true.

52. Gateway to Akshardham



85th Birthday Celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj, Atladra, 1949

In 1947 (Samvat 2004), Swamishri celebrated Annakut in Sarangpur. Now Swamishri often fell ill, and then regained good health. During his illnesses, many devotees would stay and serve him. Sometimes, his condition would become serious. Still, however, he would suddenly recover. To those who watched, it seemed as if he was independent of fate, able to contract or discard any illness at will.

In Sarangpur, a magnificent gateway had been prepared in front of the mandir. Many devotees doubted the need for such an elaborate gateway considering that there had barely been enough resources to finish the mandir itself.

Swamishri read their minds. He exclaimed, “If someone does not wish to come into the mandir, even if he does darshan of this gateway from a distance, Maharaj and Swami will themselves come to take him to Dham!” Swamishri’s words reminded all

who were present of his glory.

Swamishri then arrived in Ahmedabad. Here, he was diagnosed with a severe heart condition. Everyone was worried about what would happen now. Narayanswarupdasji burst into tears. Swamishri consoled and quietened everyone. He then went to Rajpur to attend a *parayan*. Because of his old age and recent heart troubles, whenever Swamishri exerted himself in any way or form, everyone would request, "Swami! Please rest."

Swamishri would reply, "I am constantly resting while I focus on Maharaj's *murti*. But within my heart Shriji Maharaj reminds me that whenever devotees like you all gather I should deliver discourses. Therefore, I cannot resist the urge to speak to you." Thus, Swamishri continuously gave spiritual discourses.

53. Eighty-Fifth Birthday Celebrations

Throughout his life, Swamishri endured countless hardships. Not caring for physical comfort, he travelled day and night. He imparted true *upasana* to his devotees. He guided them onto the path of righteousness and gave them peace. Swamishri's devotees felt that no amount of sacrifice could possibly repay their debt to him.

Driven by such affection, they decided to celebrate Swamishri's eighty-fifth birthday (i.e. completion of 84 years) with great festivity in Atladra on 3 February 1949 (Maha *sud* 5, Samvat 2005). They resolved to honour Swamishri with a Suvarna Tula, the traditional honour of weighing someone against gold on a scale and then offering that gold to God. When they approached Swamishri, he immediately refused the proposal. However, after much insistence from the devotees, Swamishri gave in to their affection.

Devotees from everywhere, both men and women, either offered their most treasured gold ornaments or donated money for the occasion. Everyone exceeded their limits as they made tremendous sacrifices.

On the day before his birthday celebration, the devotees seated Swamishri on a decorated elephant and took him on a procession through the city. Yogi Swami and Nirgundas Swami accompanied Swamishri on the elephant. *Murtis* of God were placed on elaborately decorated vehicles during the procession.

Years previously, Swamishri had gone to the village of Talgajarda near Mahuva. He had been sent there by Bhagatji Maharaj to beg for alms. Seeing young Yagnapurushdasji, one Patel who lived in the village had remarked, "This sadhu, who is worthy of being honoured by an elephant procession, must wander around for food!" Today, these words proved true.

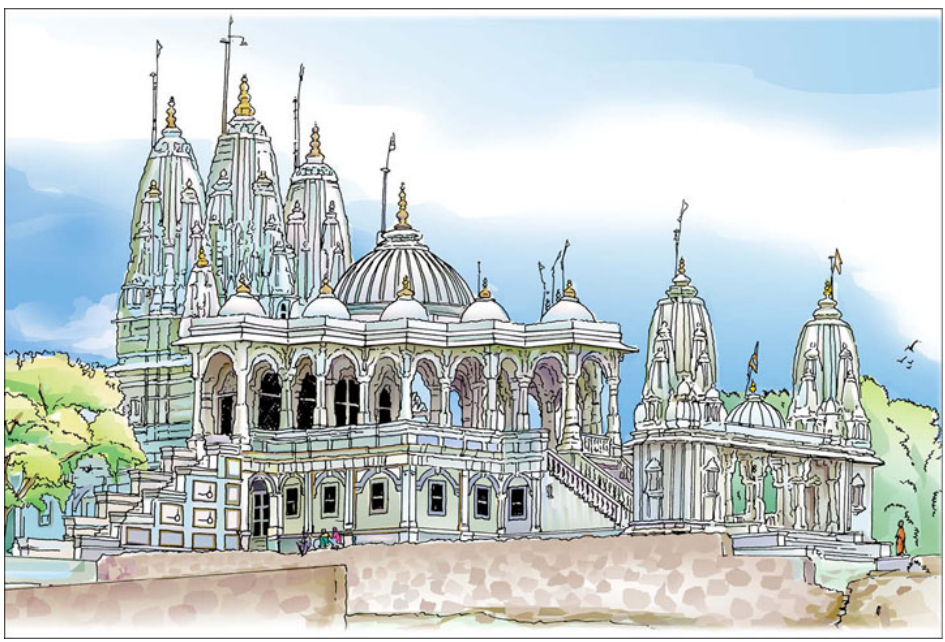
The following day, a *yagna* took place, followed by a grand assembly celebrating Swamishri's eighty-fifth birthday. Senior devotees from all over the country spoke about Swamishri's remarkable qualities.

When it was time for the Suvarna Tula, Swamishri objected, "It is not appropriate to weigh a sadhu with gold."

Everyone wondered what to do. So much effort had gone into organizing the Suvarna Tula. They pleaded to Swamishri to let them honour him, but he firmly refused. Finally, the devotees agreed to first weigh Swamishri with only sugar crystals and then weigh those sugar crystals against gold. Swamishri reluctantly consented and sat on the ceremonial scales.

Thus, Swamishri exemplified the ideal of saintliness for his sadhu disciples. Hundreds of thousands of devotees felt greatly privileged to have witnessed this magnificent event. This occasion will be remembered forever in the history of Satsang.

54. The Foundation Is Laid for a Grand Mandir in Gadhada



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Gadhada

Swamishri was now quickly completing all of his projects. Years ago, Shriji Maharaj had wished to build a mandir on the hill in Gadhada. Dada Khachar and Jiva Khachar had jointly owned the land. Dada had readily agreed to give up the land, but Jiva Khachar had refused. Maharaj's wish, therefore, had remained unfulfilled.

Shriji Maharaj had then exclaimed, "A great mandir shall be constructed here in the future and the *murtis* of myself and my choicest devotee shall be consecrated."

Swamishri wanted to fulfil Shriji Maharaj's wish. Therefore, he made many efforts to acquire the land on the hill. However, those who opposed used their influence over the state authorities in Bhavnagar. The government of Bhavnagar resolved not to give Shastri Yagnapurushdasji any land in Gadhada.

When Swamishri was informed by the government's decision, he remarked, "Since it is Maharaj's wish, Maharaj himself will use divine powers and have the land given to us. If necessary, he may even cause a shift of powers in the government."

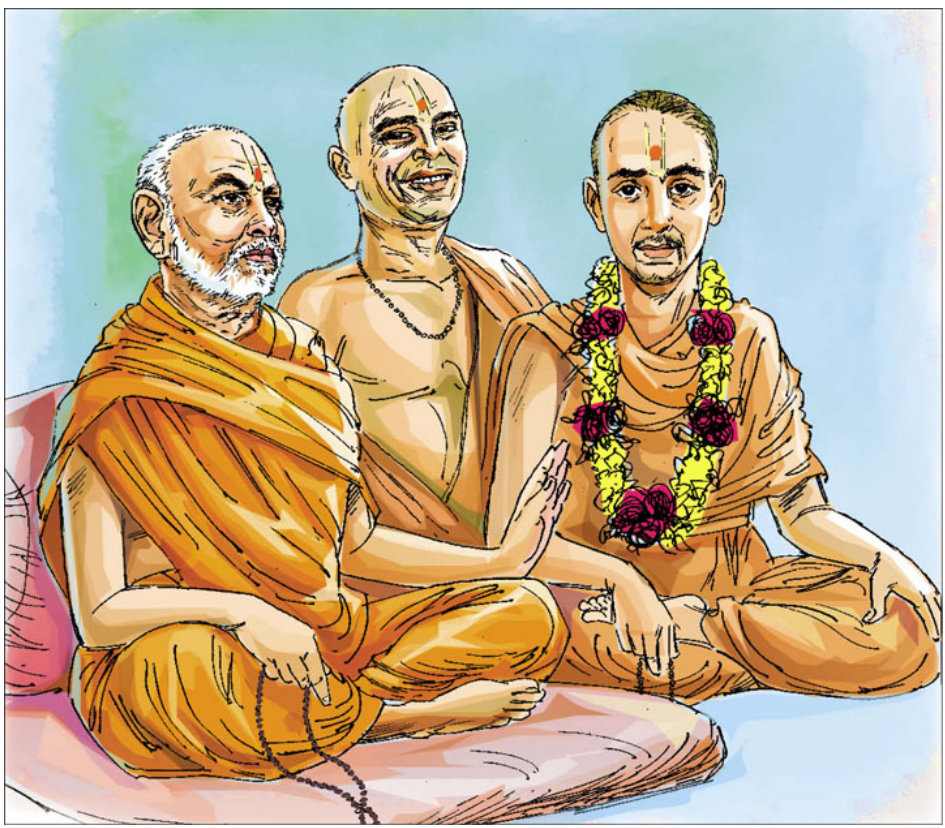
Sure enough, India gained independence. The smaller states merged with the Union. As a result, the state of Bhavnagar lost its powers. Govindsinh Chudasama, a devotee of Swamishri, was appointed as the Deputy Collector of Bhavnagar. Through his efforts, Swamishri easily acquired the land on the hill.

The ground-breaking ceremony was held on 16 November 1949 (Kartik *vad* 11, Samvat 2006). The ceremony was performed by Krishnakumarsinhji, the former ruler of Bhavnagar and current Governor of Madras.

On this occasion, he exclaimed, "Swamishri is the most eminent sadhu to be found in all of India. This mandir of Gadhada will become the greatest of India's mandirs."

Building an entirely marble mandir costing hundeds of thousands of rupees on the hill towering over the banks of the Ghela River would be difficult. Only Swamishri, because it was Shriji Maharaj's wish, would be capable of accomplishing such a feat.

55. Narayanswarupdasji Appointed President of the Sanstha



Swamishri had founded this great organization. He now wished to entrust its management to an appropriate successor, one who could also look after and further develop the Satsang. Swamishri's eyes fell on the 28-year-old sadhu, Narayanswarupdasji.

Narayanswarupdasji had stayed with and served Swamishri from a young age. He had earned Swamishri's blessings. From a young age, he had possessed virtues such as renunciation, austerity, devotion and righteousness. Because of his saintliness, his management expertise, his thorough study of the scriptures, his sweet voice, and his ability to please others, he had become everyone's favourite. Therefore, all were pleased with Swamishri's decision.

On the day of 21 May 1950 (Jeth *sud* 4, Samvat 2006), at the mandir located in Ambli Vali Pol of Ahmedabad, the ceremonious appointment of the new president of the Sanstha took place. Swamishri seated Narayanswarupdasji between himself and Yogi Swami and addressed the assembly, "Just as Sadguru Ramanand Swami had entrusted the leadership of the Sampraday to Nilkanth Varni at a young age, I, too, from today, appoint in my position as President of the Sanstha, Sadguru Shastri Narayanswarupdasji. He is young but abundant in virtues. Therefore, I call upon all of you, sadhus and devotees, to assist him so that he may excel in his role and fulfil his responsibilities. From now on, obey Sadguru Shastri Narayanswarupdasji as you have obeyed me."

Swamishri then turned and addressed Narayan-swarupdasji, "This Jogi Maharaj is a *vachan-siddh* and eminent sadhu. You must remain under his protective guidance and bring glory to the Satsang."

Swamishri then addressed Yogi Swami, "Jogi! I leave this Narayan Swami in your care. Bless him so that he may develop virtues like yours."

Yogi Swami gladly blessed Narayanswarupdasji.

Swamishri then applied a *chandlo* to Narayanswarupdasji's forehead and gave his blessings. He then placed his own *chadar*, a saffron cloth-sheet, on Narayanswarupdasji's shoulders. From then on, Narayanswarupdasji would be known as 'Pramukh Swami.'

Narayanswarupdasji prostrated to Swamishri and bowed to all of the sadhus who were present. He then humbly addressed everyone, "Whatever abilities and knowledge that I possess has been given to me by you. Please give me the strength and the skills to fulfil the responsibilities that you have entrusted me with." Swamishri's appointment as President pleased everyone.

56. Nirgundas Swami Passes Away

Nirgundas Swami developed a severe illness. He was brought to Mumbai for treatment. When Swamishri came to Mumbai, he also fell ill. Even when ill, Swamishri

would give spiritual discourses. He would discuss matters relating to Satsang history, thereby pleasing the devotees. The devotees in Mumbai also pleased him with their tremendous physical, mental, and financial *seva*.

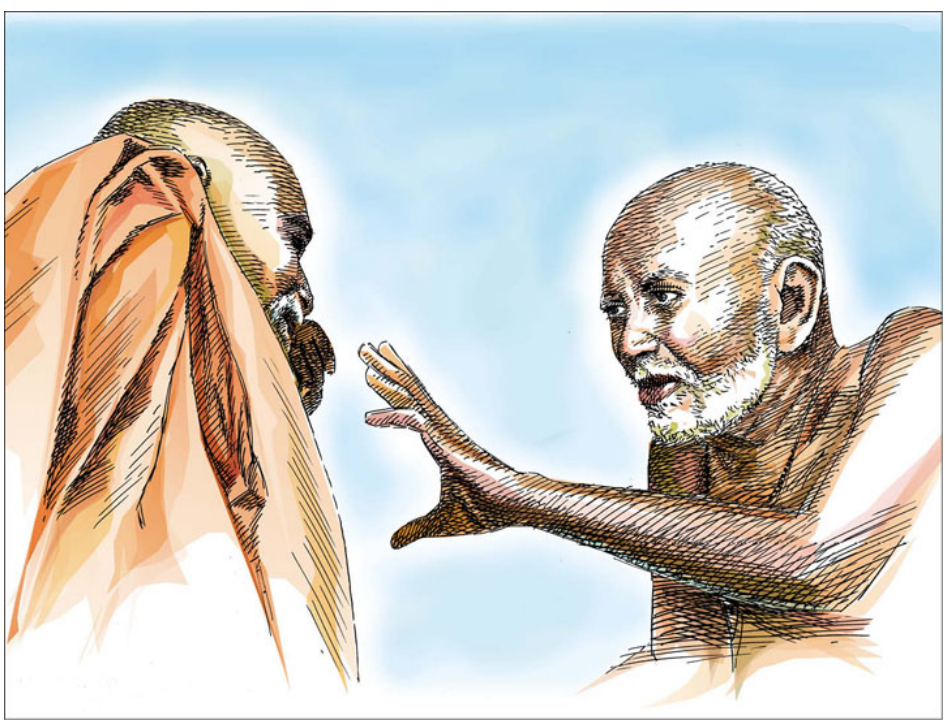
Several skilled physicians treated Nirgundas Swami. However, his health continued to deteriorate. Swamishri encouraged him to obtain more medical treatment in the village of Pen.

Nirgundas Swami had spent his entire life extolling the greatness of Swamishri and the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He was valiant in nature. Yet, he himself had never wished to be the centre of praise or worship. He had helped many devotees, always siding with them in their times of need. He had laughed with them during joyous times and grieved with them in times of difficulty.

In serving the Satsang community, Nirgundas Swami had far exceeded his limitations. Satsang in Africa had flourished because of his tireless efforts, writing countless letters to devotees. Now, everyone prayed for his quick recovery.

However, by the wish of Shriji Maharaj, on 30 May 1950 (Jeth *sud* 14, Samvat 2006), Nirgundas Swami, as he uttered the Swaminarayan mantra, departed for Akshardham. The devotees mourned the loss of such a valiant sadhu, one who was as dear to Swamishri as his own body. Swamishri consoled everyone.

57. "I Am Yogi and Yogi Is Myself."



Shastriji Maharaj blesses Yogiji Maharaj

Swamishri now fell ill quite often. Even while he was ill, he delighted the devotees with his divine personality, even amazing them with miracles. He let them serve him.

Yogi Swami soon came to Ahmedabad. He approached Swamishri to take his leave and return to Gondal.

Swamishri exclaimed, "Now, Maharaj will come to take me. So, I leave this Narayandas (Pramukh Swami) in your care. I leave all of these mandirs in your care. Look after them."

The next day, Swamishri remembered Yogi Swami and remarked, "O Jogi is indeed Jogi. He is Gunatit. There is no sadhu like him in infinite universes. He has been following my wishes for the last forty years. He intuitively understands my inner wishes."

Swamishri decided to go to Atladra for the festival of Janmashtmi so that thousands of devotees could have his darshan for the last time. Now, Swamishri intended to leave this world.

Everyone was worried about how his ailing health would allow him to undertake such a journey. Swamishri, however, got ready, sat in the car, and reached Atladra.

In Atladra, one sadhu remarked, "Swami! While turning the beads of my *mala*, I only chant your name. In my mind, you are God."

Swamishri scolded him, "Never speak like this. Everyone should chant the name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan while turning the beads of the *mala*. You should only worship him. I myself worship him. You should as well. This is my command."

58. The Last Moments

Now Swamishri expressed a wish to return to Sarangpur. Everyone was concerned about how Swamishri, being in such poor health, would be able to reach Sarangpur. But, Swamishri continued to insist.

Yogi Swami arrived from Mumbai. Hearing of Swamishri's wish, he instructed the devotees to take Swamishri to Sarangpur. Swamishri boarded the train at Vadodara. While the train halted in Ahmedabad, Swamishri addressed the devotees who had come to meet him, "Not even the slightest difference exists between Jogi and me. You all should obey Jogi Maharaj." Swamishri then left for Sarangpur.

Swamishri's health improved in Sarangpur. He instructed others to prepare for the *murti-pratishtha* in Gadhada. He sent for a car. When the car was ready, he summoned Hakabhai and said, "Let us go to Gadhada and consecrate the *murtis*." At the time, no one understood the significance of these words. Swamishri then reached Gadhada.

The following morning, he bathed the *murtis* with the sacred water of the Ghela River. He offered each *murti* a *janoi*, applied a *chandlo* on its forehead, and adorned it with garlands. He affectionately did darshan of *murtis* and performed the *arti*.

Finally, he said, "My part in the rituals is complete. The *murtis* have been consecrated. Now I do not wish to return. Jogi Maharaj will come and do *arti*." No one

understood the significance of these words. At ten o'clock, Swamishri decided to return to Sarangpur.

As he left, he said, "Now I want to stay in Sarangpur forever."

The devotees of Africa had arrived in Sarangpur. Swamishri delighted them with his darshan and divine company. Finally, he addressed them, "No one can ever equal Maharaj and Swami. To say that someone is their equal is a great offence to both of them. Philosophically speaking, one may understand that Maharaj resides in the Sadhu. If so, then what is the difference between Shriji Maharaj and such a Sadhu? It is by his association with Maharaj that the Sadhu can be called God. This understanding, which originates in the shastras, maintains the belief that Maharaj is an eternal and separate entity."

Swamishri continued, "Without acknowledging their association with Shriji Maharaj, if we believe each successive guru to be God, then the concept of an eternal and distinct God is not maintained. Our understanding then becomes like that of a Sushka-Vedanti. Shriji Maharaj resides in a Sadhu who possesses the qualities described in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 27. A Sadhu with such qualities can be said to be a form of God. He can be understood as equivalent to God. Therefore, everyone must remain within the restrictions established by Shriji Maharaj and obey his commands. Sahajanand Swami is the supreme God and Anadi Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami is the greatest Sadhu. The Ekantik Sadhu is the gateway to liberation. This is true *upasana*."

Swamishri now remained indifferent to everything. He repeatedly uttered, "Now Jogi Maharaj will do *arti* of the *murtis* in Gadhada." Yogi Swami, however, had just gone to Mumbai.

59. Hundreds of Thousands of Salutes to Shastriji Maharaj

Everyone was concerned as Swamishri's condition became critical on 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 4, Samvat 2007).

At nine in the morning, Swamishri said, "Take me to the Rang Mandap."

Swamishri was taken to the Rang Mandap. Holding their breath, the devotees did darshan of Swamishri. They chanted the Swaminarayan mantra and prayed to Shriji Maharaj. At exactly 10:50 am, the entire Rang Mandap was filled with divine light.

"Swami! Maharaj!" said Swamishri, as he breathed his last and passed away to Akshardham.

News of Swamishri's passing away soon reached all. The sadhus and devotees were devastated. Swamishri's body was laid on a pyre of sandalwood in the farm that had once been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the final rites.

The entire Satsang community was drowned in grief. Yogiji Maharaj consoled and

guided the sadhus and devotees. The *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the mandir on the hill in Gadhada was to take place in just six days. However, because of Swamishri's passing away, everyone was confused. Was it appropriate to have such a celebration?

Yogiji Maharaj said, "Has Swamishri really gone? He is ever-present. It was Swamishri's wish that the *pratishtha* be held on the tenth. Therefore, he will only be pleased if we conduct the *murti-pratishtha* as planned."

These words infused courage into the hearts of all. Everyone remembered Swamishri's words, "Jogi will do the *arti* of Gadhada mandir." With renewed enthusiasm, everyone joined in the final *seva* of Gadhada mandir. They saw Swamishri in Yogiji Maharaj.

Throughout his life, Shastriji Maharaj was in constant communion with Shriji Maharaj. He was graced by Shriji Maharaj. He came into this world and undertook the difficult task of enshrining the true *upasana of* Akshar-Purushottam. Making history through his work, he infused a new life into Satsang. His life was an ideal of saintliness. He gifted all with two great sadhus – Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Long live Swami Shastriji Maharaj!

Glossary

A

akhatrij third day of the bright half of the month of Vaishakh (May-June)

akshar-muktas A *jiva* that has attained ultimate liberation and resides forever in Akshardham with a divine body.

aksharrup form of Akshar. That which has qualities similar to those of Akshar. Used to describe the spiritual state of *aksharmuktas*. Highest level of faith or spiritual status is to become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam

annakut offering of many food items before the murti of God

arti Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the murti of God as an act of worship.

asan seat; one of the eight steps in yoga

B

bhagvati diksha initiation into the monastic order where a youth is given saffron robes to wear

brahmasthiti state of God-realization

brahmavidya knowledge of Brahman

C

chadar cotton shawl

chandlo auspicious vermillion mark applied on forehead

charanarvind holy footprints

charu treasure

chesta the daily routine and life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan composed into lyrical verses by Premanand Swami, sung by devotees at night

D

dandvat pranam prostrations

dhun chanting of God's holy name, often to the accompaniment of musical instruments

diksha initiation

dilruba a stringed instrument

divo a lighted wick in an earthen or metal crucible filled with ghee

G

gnan spiritual knowledge

gnani one who is spiritually realised with the knowledge of God

I

ishtadev chosen deity

J

janmakshar personal horoscope

janoi sacred thread

jholi bundle tied with a cloth

K

khichdi spiced boiled rice and lentil grains

kothari administrative head of mandir

M

maan a metallic pot used as a musical instrument

magas a sweet delicacy made from gram flour

mahamukta a great realized atma

mala rosary

matlu earthen pot

mukta a liberated soul

murti-pratishtha traditional Vedic ceremony in which *murtis* are consecrated in a mandir

murti image; idol

N

niyam moral and spiritual disciplines, and religious codes of conduct prescribed by God, the Satpurush, or the scriptures

P

padhramani visit by sadhus to sanctify a home

paramhansa the highest order of ascetics

parayan spiritual discourses held for several days

parshad a renunciant who wears white robes

prabhatiya bhajans sung in the morning

pradakshina circumambulation

prasad sanctified food, blessed and conse-crated by having been offered to God

pujan ritual of worship with materials such as kumkum, sandalwood paste, rice, flowers

pujari priest who performs daily rituals of the murtis

purani a person reading scriptures

S

sadguru a senior sadhu

samadhi trance

Satsang holy fellowship, the Swaminarayan Sampraday.

satsangi a member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practices satsang

seva spiritual service

shikarbaddh mandir in which five *artis* are performed daily and worship of the deities is performed by sadhus

shiro a sweet delicacy, usually of wheat flour, ghee, sugar and condiments

sinhasan throne for God

soji a type of grain

sud bright half of lunar month

T

thal food devotionally offered to God as a form of devotion, which, thus consecrated, in known as *prasad*

tumbdi gourd

U

upasana worship of God, with special emphasis on his greatness and glory

V

vachan-siddh one whose words come true

vad dark half of lunar month

vairagya detachment; an aversion or strong, persistent dislike for the world and its pleasures

vartman vow